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Harry Harrison

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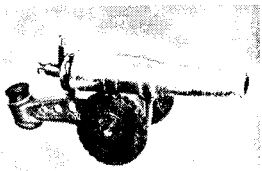

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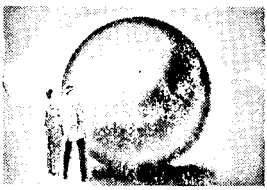

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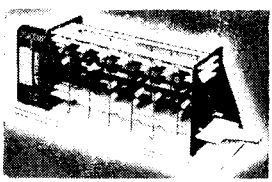

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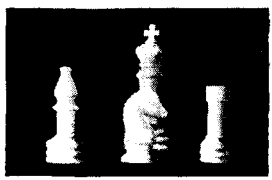

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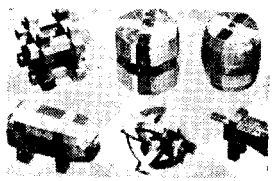

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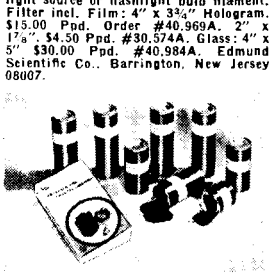

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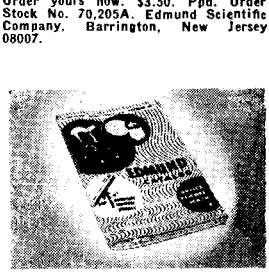

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Next issue on sale
July 11, 1967
$6.00 per year
in the U.S.A.
60 cents per copy

Cover by
John Schoenherr

Vol. LXXIX, No. 5 July 1967

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Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact is published monthly by the Condé Nast Publications, Inc. Executive, Publishing, Editorial and Advertising offices: 420 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. I.S.V. Patcevitch, President; Alfred W. Cook, Treasurer; Mary E. Campbell, Secretary. Second class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions: In U. S. possessions and Canada, $6 for one year, $10 for two years, $13 for three years. Elsewhere, $8 for one year, $16 for two years. Payable in advance. Single copies: In U. S. possessions and Canada, 60¢. Six weeks are required for change of address. In ordering a change, write to Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact, Boulder, Colorado 80302. Give both new and old address as printed on last label. The editorial contents have not been published before, are protected by copyright and cannot be reprinted without the publisher's permission. All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental. We cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or art work. Any material submitted must include return postage.
POSTMASTER: SEND FORM 3579 TO ANALOG SCIENCE FICTION/SCIENCE FACT, BOULDER, COLORADO 80302.

EDITORIAL AND
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an editorial by
John W. Campbell

Incommunicado

Assume for the moment that interstellar liners have been developed, and that Mankind has spread out through this end of the Galaxy, and is—as is characteristic of a biological system—spreading farther on a geometric expansion, doubling the number of inhabited planets every *n* years.

At a time T_0, there are 1,000 inhabited planets, averaging 1,000,000,000 inhabitants per planet, for a total of 1,000,000,000,000 individuals.

Now on a one-man-one-vote basis a democratic government, in which there was a representative congress with each representative speaking for 100,000,000 people, would have to have 10,000 members. If each representative were to be allowed to express his constituency's viewpoint on an important bill, allowing each a ten-minute speech, the debate would take 100,000 minutes or something over two months, working day and night, without holidays or rest. Allowing for human fatigue, the debate would require some six months—if every member actually was muzzled at the end of his ten-minute speech, and his successor was prepared instantly to take his place on the floor.

And if John Adams spoke against the bill, and John Zywiski wanted to answer him, it would be half a year later that they got down to the Zs in alphabetical order.

Too, of course, no one man could really represent the needs, desires, and strong feelings of 100,000,000 people—nor take care of the proper government business of 100,000,000 people. There always have been, and properly always will be, exceptional cases wherein the representative must present some individual constituent's special needs to the government.

These are things that couldn't be handled by a computer, simply because a computer can logically and faultlessly carry out directives given it—but it's inherently incapable of making judicious exceptions. And, by definition, it can't originate new rules; it may be programmed to *apply* the law, but if it's allowed to *make* the laws, then it becomes inherently unstable in operation. Logic can derive proper conclusions from given postulates—but logic cannot generate postulates from which to derive conclusions!

The essence of the whole prob-

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lem is simple: as you increase the number of units, the number rises arithmetically—but the possible interrelations rise exponentially.

A simple here-and-now example is the matter of ordinary telephone lines. When I was in grammar school, dial-system telephones were experimental gadgets, used in a few large business offices, such as Telephone Company headquarters. When I was in college, the dial systems were coming in quite widely. Now, of course, manual central offices exist only in small country towns.

Few people realized why this had to happen—most appeared to think it was a matter of Automation, with the Bosses trying to replace the Workers (Operators) with machines because it was, of course, cheaper to have a mechanical slave doing the work.

The simple fact was that as the number of telephone subscribers increased, the number of possible interconnections increased factorially.

By 1940, the number of necessary interconnection-switches to maintain service between all the telephone subscribers in the City of New York was so great that if *every* young woman between the ages of nineteen and fifty had been employed on telephone switchboards, the requirements could not have been met. Telephone service would have bogged down into long waits for service—waits so long that subscribers would have fallen away, and sent messengers with written notes as a faster and surer system.

The introduction of mechanical switching allowed the companies to pack more "operators" in less space, and "operators" capable of higher speed—but at higher cost, due to the immense capital investment required.

People brought up with the helpful human operator on the other end of the telephone objected most angrily; the dial system wouldn't make allowances for their mistakes. It wouldn't give them information they wanted without some effort and judgment on their part. It simply followed rigid rituals, and did exactly—and only—what had been determined beforehand.

The mechanical switching systems are rapidly being replaced; their operating speed is at best in the millisecond range—now we need nanosecond switching systems to handle the immense amount of traffic represented by a continent-wide dialing system. It takes me no longer to dial a friend in San Francisco than to dial my office in New York.

The dial system *had* to come in, because human operators did not exist in the necessary numbers, and could not exist in the necessary numbers in a high-standard-of-living-and-communicating community. Only when telephones were the exceptional convenience of a small proportion of the population

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in the community, *or* the population was small, could the problem be handled by human operators.

As the Galaxy becomes populated, the communications between individuals must break down. The "information explosion" now facing scientists is simply another example of the underlying problem: the communication problem becomes completely unmanageable. The different fields of science, even, develop such communication problems that useful contact between advanced specialists in different fields becomes more and more incompetent. (Here there is a normal, human barrier complicating the problem further—professionalism. The biochemists may have the information the M.D.'s need, but biochemists are laymen in M.D.-terms. While a geologist "knows" that a plastics chemist doesn't understand *his* field, and ceramics research has to do with dinner plates and vases, not the behavior of rocks.)

The problem I'm discussing, however, is not the design of telephone switchboards or Galactic governments—but the breakdown of communication in our modern cities and universities.

It stems from several things—but that proliferation of interrelationships is a major factor. The second greatest factor stems from that—the hyper-democracy effect.

In an Army, the sergeant can explain to the squad what their objective is, and how they're going to go about it. He can know the characteristics of the individual men he's dealing with. "Bull" Jones is as strong, and sturdy, and courageous as his nickname implies; he's also about equally dumb. He's just the guy to carry the heavy machine gun forward—but don't send him on a scouting mission. He moves with all the delicacy of a bull elephant, and has eyes, but sees not; ears, but hears not. For that job, little Maury Finkelstein, 5′4″, one hundred thirty pounds soaked with mud, and normally operating in a state of acute fear is perfect. Sees all, hears all, and moreover can report it back accurately. And because he's always operating scared, he can slip through two hundred fifty yards of mud, under three lines of barbed wire, and get back without making a sound.

General Storm, commanding the Fourth Army, isn't aware that the sergeant exists, and knows nothing whatever of "Bull" Jones and/or Maury Finkelstein. All he can know is that Sergeants exist, and that, in any army, there will be bull-like characters, and slim, scared, silent-moving, wiry characters like little Maury. He will be perfectly aware that the Maury-type has more courage than the Bull-type; Bulls too thick-headed to have the imagination to be rationally scared. General Storm can be perfectly sure that such men will be there in his army—

continued on page 172

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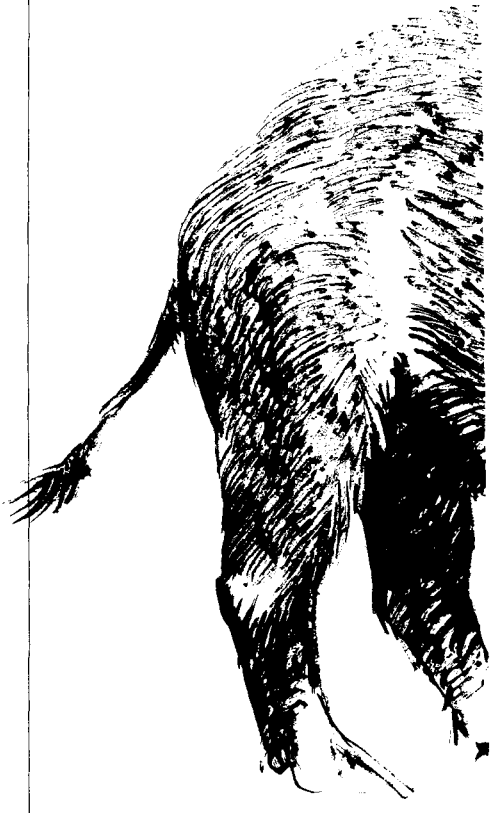
THE MAN FROM P.I.G.

The pig is a comical beast, of course —except that the wild boar is also the wiliest and most ferocious of big game animals!

HARRY HARRISON

Illustrated by John Schoenherr



"This is the end of our troubles, Governor, it sure is!" the farmer said. The rustic next to him nodded agreement and was moved enough by the thought to lift the hat from his head, shout *yippee* once, then clamp it back on.

"Now I can't positively promise anything," Governor Haydin said, but there was more than a hint of eagerness in his words and he twirled his moustache with extraordinary exuberance. "Don't know any more about this than you do. We radioed for help and the Patrol said they'd do something . . ."

"And now a starcruiser is in orbit up there and her tender is on the way down," the farmer broke in, finishing the governor's sentence. "Sounds good enough for me. Help is on the way!"

The heavens boomed an answer to his words, and a spike of brilliant flame burned through the low-lying clouds above the field as the stubby

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form of the tender came into view. The crowd along the edge, almost the entire population of Trowbri City, burst into a ragged cheer. They restrained themselves as the ship rode its fiery exhaust down to the muddy field, settling in a cloud of steam, but as soon as the jets flicked off they surged forward to surround it.

"What's in there, Governor," someone asked, "a company of space commandos or suchlike?"

"The message didn't say—just asked for a landing clearance."

There was a hushed silence as the gangway ground out of its slot below the port and the end clattered down into the mud. The outer hatch swung open with the shrill whine of an electric motor and a man stepped into the opening and looked down at the crowd.

"Hi," he said, then turned and waved inside. "C'mon out, you-all," he shouted, then put his fingers to his lips and whistled shrilly.

His words evoked a chorus of high-pitched cries and squeals from inside the tender and out of the port and down the gangway swept a thundering wave of animals. Their backs, pink, black and white, and gray, bobbed up and down and their hooves beat out a rumble of sound on the perforated metal.

"Pigs," the governor shouted, his angry voice rising over the chorus of porcine squeals. "Is there nothing but *pigs* aboard this ship?"

"There's me, sir," the man said, stopping in front of the governor. "Wurber's my name, Bron Wurber, and these here are my animals. I'm mighty glad to meet you."

Governor Haydin's eyes burnt a track up from the ground, slowly consuming every inch of the tall man who stood before him, taking in the high rubber boots, the coarse material of the crumpled trousers, the heavy, stained folds of the once-red jacket, the wide smiling face and clear blue eyes of the pig farmer. The governor winced when he saw the bits of straw in the man's hair. He completely ignored Wurber's outstretched hand.

"What are you doing here?" Haydin asked.

"Come to homestead. Figure to open me a pig ranch. It'll be the only pig ranch for more'n fifty light-years in any direction and, not meaning to boast, that's saying a lot." He wiped his right hand on his jacket then slowly extended it again. "Name's Wurber, most folk call me Bron because that's my first name. I'm afraid I didn't catch yours?"

"Haydin," he said, reluctantly extending his hand. "I'm the governor here." He looked down abstractedly at the rounded, squealing forms that milled about them in a churning circle.

"Why I'm that pleased to meet you, Governor, it's sure a big job you got here," Bron said, happily pumping the other's hand up and down.

The rest of the spectators were

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already leaving and when one of the pigs, a great, rounded sow, came too close to them a man turned and lashed out an iron-shod boot. Her shrill screams sliced the air like a run-wild buzz saw as she fled.

"Here, none of that," Bron shouted over the backs of his charges. The angry man just shook his fist backwards and went away with the rest of the crowd.

"Clear the area," an amplified voice bellowed from the tender. "Blast off in one minute. Repeat, sixty seconds to blast-off."

Bron whistled again and pointed to a grove of trees at the edge of the field. The pigs squealed answer and began moving in that direction. The trucks and cars were pulling out and when the churning herd—with Bron and the governor at its center—reached the edge of the field only the governor's car was left. Bron started to say something but his words were drowned out by the tender's rockets and the deafening squealing and grunting of fright that followed it. When it died away he spoke again.

"If you're driving into the city, sir, I wonder if you'd let me drive along with you. I have to file my land claims."

"You wouldn't want to do that," the governor said, groping around for an excuse to get rid of the rustic clod. "This herd is valuable property, you wouldn't want to leave them here alone."

"Do you mean there're criminals and *thieves* in your town?"

"I didn't say that," Haydin snapped. "The people here are as decent and law abiding as any you can find. It's just that, well, we're a little short of meat animals and the sight of all that fresh pork on the hoof . . ."

"Why that notion is plumb criminal, Governor. This is the finest breeding stock that money can buy and none of them are for slaughtering. Do you realize that every critter here will eventually be the ancestor of entire herds of . . ."

"Just spare me the lecture on animal husbandry, I'm needed in the city."

"Can't keep the good folks waiting," Bron said with a wide and simple smile. "I'll drive in with you and make my own way back. I'm sure these swine will be safe enough here. They can root around in this patch of woods and take care of themselves for a bit."

"Well it's your funeral—or maybe theirs," Haydin mumbled, getting into the electric car and slamming the door behind him. He looked up with a sudden thought as Bron climbed in the other side. "Say . . . where's your luggage? Did you forget it in the tender?"

"Now that's shore nice of you to worry about me like that." Bron pointed out at the herd which had separated a bit now that the swine were rooting happily in the forest humus. A large boar had two long

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cases strapped to his back, and a smaller pig nearby had a battered suitcase tied on at a precarious angle.

"People don't appreciate how all-around valuable pigs are. On Earth they've been beasts of burden for umpteen thousands of years, yessir. Why there's nothing as all-around as a pig. The old Egyptians used them for planting seeds, you know their bitty little sharp hooves just trod those seeds down to the right depth in the soft soil."

Governor Haydin jammed the rheostat full on and drove numbly into town with a bucolic discourse on swinology echoing about his head. Bron followed him into the municipal building and the governor quickly turned him over to his aide, Lea Davies, who, along with the banks of computers, made up the complete governmental staff. She was putting her handkerchief away as they came up, and her eyes were red. The governor gave her shoulder a quick pat before vanishing into his office.

Bron filed his claim papers and obtained maps of the areas opened to homesteading. Lea was businesslike and efficient but could not be led into a discussion about anything other than the matter at hand. Bron finally promised to return and make a detailed claim as soon as he had looked over the various parcels of land. He stumped out, clumsy in his heavy boots, and stood on the top of the steps looking down Trowbri City's main—and almost only—street.

Prefabs and pressure huts were interspersed with rammed earth buildings and woodframe structures. Trowbri had only been colonized for a few years and was still in its raw and vigorous youth. The city was also the planet's only settlement, though farms and small factories trickled out into the surrounding countryside. This was a good planet, like Earth in many ways, fertile and plump with mineral wealth waiting to be tapped. The settlers had all been hand chosen and were well financed; it should have been a happy place. Instead there was an undefinable feeling of unease in the air, a look on the faces of the passersby, the obvious fact that Lea Davies had been crying yet would not talk about it.

Hands in pockets, whistling lightly through his teeth, Bron walked back slowly to the spaceport—really just a cleared area and control tower—looking about him as he went.

As he came near the grove where he had left his animals he heard a shrill, angry squealing. He quickened his pace, then broke into a ground-consuming run as other squeals joined the first. Some of the pigs were still rooting unconcernedly, but most of them were gathered about a tall tree that was entwined with creepers and studded with short branches. A boar reared his

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head out of the milling herd and slashed at the tree, peeling away a yard long strip of bark. From high in the tree a hoarse voice called for help.

Bron whistled instructions, pulled on tails and pushed on fat flanks and finally got the pigs moving about again. As soon as they began rooting and stripping the berries from the bushes he called up into the tree.

"Whoever's there can come down now. It's safe."

The tree shook and a patter of bits of bark fell, and a tall, skinny man climbed down slowly into view. He stopped above Bron's head, holding tightly to the trunk. His trousers were torn and the heel was gone from one boot.

"Who are you?" Bron asked.

"Are these your beasts?" the man said angrily. "They ought to be shot. They attacked me, viciously . . . would have killed me if I hadn't got to this tree . . ."

"Who are you?" Bron repeated.

". . . Vicious and uncontrolled. If you don't take care of them, I will. We have laws here on Trowbri . . ."

"If you don't shut up and tell me who you are, mister, you can just stay in that tree until you rot," Bron said quietly. He pointed to the large boar who was lying down about ten feet from the tree and glaring at it out of tiny, red eyes. "I don't have to do anything and these pigs will take care of you all by themselves. It's in their blood. Peccaries in Mexico will tree a man and then take turns standing guard below until he dies, or falls out. These animals here don't attack anyone without reason. I say the reason is you came by and tried to grab up one of the sucklings because you had a sudden yearning for fresh pork. Who are you?"

"You calling me a liar?" the man shouted.

"Yes. Who are you?"

The boar came over and butted against the tree and made a deep grumbling noise. The man above clutched the tree with both arms and all the air went out of him.

"I'm . . . Reymon . . . the radio operator here. I was in the tower landing the tender. When it left I grabbed my cycle and started back to town. I saw these pigs here and I stopped, just to have a look, and that's when I was attacked. Without reason . . ."

"Shore, shore," Bron said, and dug his toe into the boar's side and scraped it up and down on the heavy ribs. The boar flapped his ears and rumbled a happy grunt. "You like it up in that tree, Mr. Reymon?"

"All right then, I bent down to touch one of your filthy animals. Don't ask me why. Then I was attacked."

"That sounds more like it, and I'm not gonna bother you with foolish questions as to why you had a sudden urge to pet a filthy pig. You can come down now and get on your red wagon and get moving."

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The boar flicked its twist of a tail then vanished into the undergrowth. Reymon shakily dropped to the ground and brushed off his clothes. He was a darkly handsome man whose features were spoiled by the angry tightness of his mouth.

"You'll hear more about this," he said over his shoulder as he stumbled away.

"I doubt it," Bron told him. He went to the road and waited until the electrobike whizzed by in the direction of the city. Only then did he go back and whistle his flock together.

It was well past midnight, much closer to dawn, when the shadow slid across the street and slipped behind the municipal building. It moved close to the ground, a tiny dark shape that was almost impossible to see. A moment later a taller form joined it. One of the windows slid open soundlessly and the shadows vanished from sight. The night sounds started up again in the surrounding bushes.

Governor Haydin sat up suddenly as the lights came on in his bedroom. The first thing he saw was a small pink pig sitting on the rug by his bed. It turned its head to look him directly in the eye—then winked. It had lovely, long white eyelashes.

"Sorry to disturb you at this hour," Bron said from the window, as he made sure the curtains were completely drawn, "but I didn't want anyone to see us meeting."

"Get out of here you insane swineherd before I throw you out!" Haydin bellowed.

"Not so loud, sir," Bron cautioned. "You may be overheard. Here is my identification." He held out a plastic rectangle.

"I know who you are, so what difference . . ."

"Not this identification. You did ask the Patrol for aid on this planet, didn't you?"

"What do you know about that?" The governor's eyes widened at the thought. "You mean to say you have something to do with them?"

"My identification," Bron said, snapping to attention and handing over the card.

Governor Haydin grabbed it with both hands. "P.I.G." he read. "What's that?" Then answered his own question in a hoarse voice as he read the next line. *"Porcine Interstellar Guard!* Is this some kind of joke?"

"Not at all, Governor. The Guard has only been recently organized and activated while knowledge of its activities has heretofore been confined to command levels, where its operational configurations are top secret."

"All of a sudden you don't sound like a pig farmer any more."

"I am a pig farmer, Governor. But I have a degree in animal husbandry, a doctorate in galactic politics and a black belt in judo. The pig farmer is used for field cover."

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"Then—*you're* the answer to my distress message to the Patrol?"

"That's correct. I can't give you any classified details, but you must surely know how thin the Patrol is spread these days—and will be for years to come. When a new planet is opened up it extends Earth's sphere of influence in a linear direction—but the volume of space that must be controlled is the *cube* of that distance. The Patrol must operate between all the planets and the volume of space that this comprises is beyond imagining. Someday, it is hoped, there will be enough Patrol vessels to fill this volume so that a cruiser can answer any call for help. But as it stands now, other means of assistance must be found. There are a number of projects being instigated and the P.I.G. is one of the first to go operational. You've seen my unit. We can travel by any form of commercial transportation so we can operate without Patrol assistance. We carry rations, but if needs be are self-supporting. We are equipped to handle almost any tactical situation."

Haydin was trying to understand but it was still all too much for him. "I hear what you're saying, still," he faltered, "all you have is a herd of pigs."

Bron grabbed his temper hard and his eyes narrowed to slits with the effort. "Would you have felt better if I had landed with a pack of wolves? Would that have given you some sense of security?"

"Well, I do admit that it would look a good deal different. I could see some sense in that."

"Can you? In spite of the fact that in their natural state a wolf—or wolves—will run from a full-grown wild boar without ever considering attacking him. And I have a mutated boar out there that will take on any six wolves and produce six torn wolf skins in about as many minutes. Do you doubt this?"

"It's not a matter of doubt. But you have to admit that there is something . . . I don't know . . . ludicrous maybe, about a herd of pigs."

"That observation is not exactly original," Bron said in a toneless, arctic voice. "In fact that is the reason I take the whole herd rather than just boars, and why I do the dumb farmer bit. People take no notice and it helps my investigation. Which is also why I am seeing you at night like this. I don't want to blow my cover until I have to."

"That's one thing you won't have to worry about. Our problem doesn't involve any of the settlers."

"What exactly *is* your problem? Your message wasn't exactly clear on that point."

Governor Haydin looked uncomfortable. He wriggled a bit, then examined Bron's identification again. "I'll have to check this before I can tell you anything."

"Please do."

There was a fluoroscope on the

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end table and Haydin made a thorough job of comparing the normally invisible pattern with the code book he took from his safe. Finally, almost reluctantly, he handed the card back. "It's authentic," he said.

Bron slipped the card back into his pocket. "Now what is the trouble?" he asked.

Haydin looked at the small pig that was curled up on the rug, snoring happily. "It's ghosts," he said in a barely audible voice.

"And you're the one who laughs at pigs."

"There's no need to get offensive," the governor answered warmly. "I know it sounds strange, but there it is. We call them—or the phenomena 'ghosts' because we don't know whether they're supernatural or not. It's anyone's guess, but it's sure not physical." He turned to the map on the wall and tapped a yellowish-tan area that stood out from the surrounding green. "Right here, the Ghost Plateau, that's where the trouble is."

"What sort of trouble?"

"It's hard to say, just a feeling mostly. Ever since this planet was settled, going on fifteen years now, people haven't liked to go near the plateau, even though it lies almost outside the city. It doesn't feel right up there, somehow. Even the animals stay away. And people have disappeared there and no trace has ever been found of them."

Bron looked at the map, tracing the yellow gradient outline with his finger. "Hasn't it been explored?" he asked.

"Of course, in the first survey. And copters still fly over it and there's never anything out of the way to be seen. But only in daylight. No one has ever flown, or driven, or walked on the Ghost Plateau during the night and lived to tell about it. Nor has a single body ever been found."

The governor's voice was heavy with grief: there was no doubt that he meant what he said. "Has anything ever been done about this?" Bron asked.

"Yes. We've learned to stay away. This is not Earth, Mr. Wurber, no matter to how many points it resembles it. It is an alien planet with alien life on it, and this human settlement is just a pinprick in the planet's hide. Who knows what . . . creatures are out there in the night. We are settlers, not adventurers. We have learned to avoid the plateau, at least at night, and we have never had that kind of trouble anywhere else."

"Then why have you called on the Patrol?"

"Because we made a mistake. The old-timers don't talk much about the plateau and a lot of the newcomers believe that the stories are just . . . stories. Some of us even began to doubt our own memories. In any case, a prospecting team wanted to look for some new mine sites, and the only untouched area near the city is on the plateau. In

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spite of our misgivings the team went out, led by an engineer name of Huw Davies."

"Any relation to your assistant?"

"Her brother."

"That explains her agitation. What happened?"

Haydin's eyes were unfocused as he gazed at a fearful memory. "It was horrible," he said. "We took all precautions, of course, followed them by copter during the day and marked their camp. The copters were rigged with lights and we stood by all night. They had three radios and all of them were in use so there could be no communication breakdown. We waited all night and there was no trouble. Then, just before dawn—without any alarm or warning—the radios cut out. We got there within minutes, but it was too late. What we found is almost too awful to describe. Everything—their equipment, tents, supplies—was destroyed, crushed and destroyed. There was blood everywhere, spattering the broken trees and the ground—but the men were gone, vanished. There were no tracks of animals, or men, or machines in the area—nothing. The blood was tested, it was human blood. And the fragments of flesh were . . . human flesh."

"There must have been something," Bron insisted. "Some identifying marks, some clues, perhaps the odor of explosive, or something on your radar since this plateau is so close."

"We are not stupid men. We have technicians and scientists. There were no clues, no smells, nothing on radar. I repeat, nothing."

"And this is when you decided to call the Patrol."

"Yes. This thing is too big for us to handle."

"You were absolutely correct, Governor. I'll take it from here. In fact I already have a very good idea what happened."

Haydin was jolted to his feet. "You can't! What is it?"

"I'm afraid it is a little too early to say. I'm going up to the plateau in the morning to look at this place where the massacre happened. Can you give me the map coordinates? And please don't mention my visit to anyone."

"Little chance of that," Haydin said, looking at the little pig. It stood and stretched, then sniffed loudly at the bowl of fruit on the table.

"Jasmine would like a piece," Bron said. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Go ahead, help yourself," the governor said resignedly, and loud chomping filled the room as he wrote down the coordinates and directions.

There was little of the night left and the animals were up and stirring about when Bron came back to the camp.

"I think we'll stay here at least another day," he said as he cracked open a case of vitamin rations.

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Queeny, the eight-hundred-pound Poland China sow, grunted happily at this announcement and rooted up a wad of leaves and threw them into the air.

"Good foraging, I don't doubt it, particularly after all that time in the ship. I'm going to take a little trip, Queeny, and I'll be back by dark. You keep an eye on things until then." He raised his voice, "Curly! Moe!"

A crashing in the forest echoed his words and a moment later two long, grayish-black forms tore out of the underbrush, a ton of bone and muscle on the hoof. A three-inch branch was in Curly's way and he neither swerved nor slowed. There was a sharp crack and he skidded up to Bron with the broken branch draped across his back. Bron threw the branch aside and looked at his shock troops.

They were boars, twins from the same litter, and weighed over one thousand pounds apiece. An ordinary wild boar will weigh up to seven hundred fifty pounds and is the fastest, most dangerous and bad-tempered beast known. Curly and Moe were mutants, a third again heavier and many times as intelligent as their wild ancestors. But nothing else had changed. They were still just as fast, dangerous and bad tempered, only they weighed a good deal more and their ten-inch tusks were capped with stainless steel to prevent them from splitting.

"I want you to stay here with Queeny, Moe, and she'll be in charge."

Moe squealed in anger and tossed his great head. Bron grabbed a handful of hide and thick bristles between Moe's shoulder blades, the boar's favorite itch spot, and twisted and pummeled it. Moe burbled happily through his nose. Moe was a pig genius, which made him a sort of retarded moron on the human level—except he wasn't human. He understood simple orders and would obey them within the limits of his capacity.

"Stay and guard, Moe, stay and guard. Watch Queeny, she knows what is best. Guard, don't kill. Plenty good things to eat here—and candy when I get back. Curly goes with me, and everyone gets candy when we come back." There were happy grunts from all sides and Queeny pressed her fat side against his leg.

Bron used his compass to get a heading towards the Ghost Plateau and pointed his arm in the correct direction. Curly put his head down and catapulted into the undergrowth. There was a snapping and crackling as he tore his way through, the perfect pathfinder who made his own openings where none were available.

"You, too, Jasmine," Bron said. "A good walk will keep you out of trouble. Go get Maisie Mule-Foot, the exercise will do her good, too."

Jasmine was his problem child. Though she only looked like a half-

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grown shoat, she was a full grown Pitman-Moore miniature, a strain of small pigs that had originally been developed for use in laboratories. This breed had been used in breeding for intelligence and Jasmine probably had the highest I.Q. ever to come out of the lab. But there was a handicap, with the intelligence went an instability, an almost human hysteria as though her mind were balanced on a sharp edge. If she were left with the other pigs she would tease and torture them and cause trouble, so Bron made sure that she was with him if he had to be away from the herd for any length of time.

Maisie was a totally different case, a typical, well-rounded sow, a Mule-Foot, a general purpose breed. Her intelligence was low—or pig-normal—and her fecundity high. Some cruel people might say she was good only for bacon. But she had a pleasant personality and was a good mother, in fact she had just been weaned from her last litter. Bron took her along to give her some relief from her weanling progeny—and also to run some fat off her since she had grown uncommonly plump during the confined space voyage.

They made good time, in spite of Maisie's wheezing complaints, and within an hour had reached the rising ground that marked the approach to the plateau. There was a stream here and Bron let the pigs drink their fill while he cut himself a stick for the climb. Maisie, overheated by her exertions dropped full length into the water with a tremendous splash and soaked herself. Jasmine, a fastidious animal, squealed with rage and rushed away to roll in the grass and dry herself off where she had been splashed. Curly, with much chuffing and grunting like a satisfied locomotive, got his nose under a rotting log that must have weighed over a half ton and rolled it over and happily consumed the varied insect and animal life he found beneath it. They moved on.

It was not a long climb to the plateau, and once over the edge the ground leveled out into a lightly forested plain. Bron took another compass reading and pointed Curly in the right direction. He snorted and raked a furrow in the ground with a forehoof before setting off, and Jasmine pressed up against Bron's leg and squealed. Bron could feel it, too, and had to suppress an involuntary shiver. There was something—how could it be described?—*wrong* about this place. He had no idea why he felt this way, but he did. And the pigs seemed to sense it, too. There was something else wrong, there was not a bird in sight although the hills below had been filled with them. And there did not seem to be any other animals about, the pigs would surely have called his attention to any he might have missed.

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Bron fought down the sensation and followed Curly's retreating hindquarters, while the two other pigs, still protesting, trotted behind him, staying as close to his legs as possible. It was obvious that they all felt this presentiment of danger, and they were all bothered by it. All except Curly, that is, since any strange emotion or sensation just tripped his boarish temper so that he plowed ahead filled with mumbling anger.

When they reached the clearing there was no doubt that it was the correct one. Branches on all sides were bent and twisted and small trees pulled down, while torn tents and crushed equipment littered the area. Bron picked up a transceiver and saw that the metal case had been pinched and twisted, as though squeezed by some giant hand.

And all of the time, as he searched the area, he was aware of the tension and pressure.

"Here, Jasmine," he said, "take a smell of this. I know it's been out in the rain and sun for weeks now, but there may be a trace of something left. Give a sniff."

Jasmine shivered and shook her head *no* and pressed up against his legs: he could feel her body shiver. She was in one of her states and good for nothing until it passed. Bron didn't blame her—he felt a little that way himself. He gave Curly the case to smell, and the boar took an obliging sniff, but his attention wasn't really on it. His little eyes scanned in all directions while he smelled it, and then he sniffed around the clearing, snuffling and snorting to blow the dirt out of his nostrils. Bron thought he was on to something when he began to rip the ground with his upper tusks, but it was only a succulent root that he had smelled. He chomped at it—then suddenly raised his head and pointed his ears at the woods, the root dangling forgotten from his jaws.

"What is it?" Bron asked, because the other two animals were pointing in the same direction, listening intently. Their ears twitched and there was the sudden sound of something large crashing through the bush.

The suddenness of the attack almost finished Bron. The crashing still sounded some distance away when the Bounder plunged out of the woods almost on top of him, foot-long yellow claws outstretched. Bron had seen pictures of these giant marsupials, native to the planet, but the reality was something else again. It stood on its hind legs, twelve feet high, and even the knowledge that it was not carnivorous and used the claws for digging in the marshes was not encouraging. It also used them against its enemies and he seemed to be in that category at the moment. The creature sprang out, loomed over him, the claws swung down.

Curly, growling with rage, hit the

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beast from the side. Even twelve feet of brown-furred marsupial cannot stand up to one thousand pounds of angry boar and the big beast went over and back. As he passed, Curly flicked his head with a wicked twist that hooked a tusk into the animal's leg and ripped. With a lightning spin the boar reversed direction and returned to the attack.

The Bounder was not having any more. Shrieking with pain and fear it kept on going in the opposite direction just as its mate—the one that had been blundering through the woods—appeared in the clearing. Curly spun again, reversing within one body length, and charged. The Bounder, it must have been the male because of its size, sized the situation up instantly and did not like it. Its mate was fleeing in pain—and telling everybody about it loudly—and without a doubt this underslung, hurtling mass of evil-looking creature must be to blame. Without slowing the Bounder kept going and vanished among the trees on the opposite side.

Through the entire affair Jasmine had rushed about, accomplishing very little but obviously on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Maisie, never one for quick reflexes, just stood and flapped her ears and grunted with amazement.

As Bron reached into his pocket to get a Miltown for Jasmine the long, green snake slithered out of the woods almost at his feet.

He stopped, frozen, with his hand halfway to his pocket, because he knew he was looking at death. This was the Angelmaker, the most poisonous serpent on Trowbri, more deadly than anything mother Earth had ever produced. It had the meat-hungry appetite of a constrictor—because it was a constrictor in its eating habits—but it also had fangs and well-filled venom sacks. And it was agitated, weaving back and forth and preparing to strike.

It was obvious that portly, pink Maisie, sow and mother, did not have the reflexes, or the temperament, to deal with attacking marsupials—but a snake was something else altogether. She squealed and jumped forward, moving her weight with ponderous agility.

The Angelmaker saw the appealing mass of quivering flesh and struck, instantly darting its head back and striking again. Maisie, snorting with the effort to turn her head and look back over her shoulder, squealed again and backed towards the poised snake. It hissed loudly and struck another time, perhaps wondering in some dim corner of its vestigial brain why this appealing dinner did not drop down so he could eat it. If the Angelmaker knew a bit more about pigs, it might have acted differently. Instead it struck again, and by now most of its venom was gone.

While the Mule-Foot is not a lard type, it is a sturdy breed and the females do run to fat. Maisie was

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plumper than most. Her hind quarters, what some crude carnivorous types might call her hams, were coated with heavy fat. And there is no blood circulation through fat. The venom was deposited in the fat where it could not reach the blood stream and could do no injury. Eventually it would be neutralized and disposed of. Right now Maisie was turning the tables. The Angelmaker struck again, listlessly, because its venom was gone. Maisie heaved her bulk about and chopped down with her hooves, strong, sharp-edged weapons. While snakes may like to kill pigs, pigs greatly enjoy eating snakes.

Squealing and bouncing heavily Maisie landed on the snake's spine and neatly amputated its head. The body still writhed and she attacked again, chopping with her hooves until the snake had been cut into a number of now motionless segments. Only then did she stop attacking and mumbled happily to herself while she ate them. It was a big snake and she allowed Curly and Jasmine to help her with it. Bron waited for them to finish before moving out, because the feast was calming them down. Only when the last chunk had vanished did he turn and start back for the camp. He kept looking back over his shoulder and found that it was a great relief—for all of them—to start down the slope away from the Ghost Plateau.

They were greeted with grunts of welcome when they reached the rest of the herd, while the most intelligent beasts remembered the promised candy and crowded around waiting for it. Bron opened a case of the vitamin and mineral reinforced candy and while he was distributing it he heard the buzz of his phone, very dimly because he had yet to unpack it from the carrying case. When he had filled out the homesteading forms he had entered his phone number, but as far as he knew the only person who had seen the papers was Lea Davies. He pulled out the phone, flipped up the screen and thumbed it on.

"Now I was just thinking 'bout you, Miss Davies," he said to the image on the small screen. "Ain't that a coincidence."

"Very," she said, barely moving her lips when she spoke, as though groping for words. She was a pretty girl, but looking too haggard now. Her brother's death had hit her hard. "I must see you . . . Mr. Wurber. As soon as possible."

"Now that's right friendly, Miss Lea, I'm looking forward to that."

"I need your help, but we mustn't be seen talking together. Can you come as soon as it is dark, alone, to the rear entrance of the municipal building? I'll meet you there."

"I'll be there—you can count on me," he said, and rung off.

What was this about? Did the girl know something no one else knew? It was possible. Then, too, the governor might have told her about

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P.I.G., since she was his only assistant. And on top of that she was very attractive, when she wasn't crying. As soon as he had fed the herd he broke out some clean clothes and his razor.

Bron left at dusk and Queeny lifted her head to watch him go. She would be in charge until he came back, the rest of the pigs knew and expected that, and she had Curly and Moe ready to take care of any trouble that might arise. Curly was sleeping off the day's exertions, whistling placidly through his nose, and next to him little Jasmine was also asleep, even more tired and sedated by a large Miltown. The situation was well in hand.

Approaching the municipal building from its unlighted rear was no problem, since he had been over the same ground just the previous evening. All this running about was getting to him at last and he choked off a yawn with his fist.

"Miss Lea, are you there?" he called softly, pushing open the unlocked door. The hall beyond was black, and he hesitated.

"Yes, I'm here," her voice called out. "Please come in."

Bron pushed the door wide, stepped through, and a crashing pain struck him across the side of the head, the agony of it lighting the darkness of his nerves for an instant. He tried to say something, but could not speak, though he did manage to raise his arm. Another blow struck his forearm, numbing it so that it dropped away, and the third blow across the back of his neck sent him plunging down into a deeper darkness.

"What happened?" the wavering pink blob asked, and with much blinking Bron managed to focus on it and recognized Governor Haydin's worried face.

"You tell me," Bron said hoarsely, and was aware for the first time of the pain in his head and he almost passed out again. Something damp and cool snuffled against his neck and he worked his hand up to twist Jasmine's ear.

"I thought I told you to get that pig out of here," someone said.

"Leave her be," Bron said, "and tell me what happened." He turned his head, with infinite caution, and saw that he was lying on the couch in the governor's office. A medical looking type with a stern face and dangling stethoscope was standing by. There were a number of other people at the doorway.

"We just found you here," the governor said. "That's all we know. I was just leaving my office when I heard this screaming, like a girl getting her throat cut, something terrible. Some of these other men heard it outside in the street and we all came running. Found you lying in the rear hall, out cold with your head laid open, and this pig standing next to you doing all the screaming. I never knew an animal could sound like that. It wouldn't let any-

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one near you, kept charging and chomping its teeth in a very threatening manner. Quieted down a bit by the time the doctor came and finally let him get over to you."

Bron thought quickly, or at least as quickly as he could with a power-saw trying to take off the back of his head.

"Then you know as much about it as I do," he said. "I came here to see about filing my homesteading papers. The front was locked and I thought maybe I could get in by the back, if anyone was still here. I walked through the back door and something hit me and the next thing I knew I was waking up here. Guess I can thank Jasmine for that. She must have followed me and seen me hit. Must have started squealing, like you heard, and probably chewed on the ankle of whoever hit me. Pigs have very good teeth. Must have frightened off, whoever it was." He groaned. "Can you give me something for my head?"

"There is a possibility of concussion," the doctor said.

"I'll take my chances on that, Doc, better a little concussion than my head splitting into two halves this way."

By the time the doctor had finished and the crowd dispersed his head had subsided to a throbbing ache, and Bron was fingering his bruised arm which he had just noticed for the first time. He waited until the governor had closed and locked the door before he spoke.

"I didn't tell you the whole story," he said.

"I didn't think you had. Now what is this all about?"

"I was struck by a party or parties unknown, that part was all true, and if Jasmine had not woke up and found me missing and gotten all neurotically insecure I would probably be dead at this moment. It was a trap and I walked into it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Lea Davies is involved in this. She called me, arranged to meet me here and was waiting here when I arrived."

"Are you trying to say . . ."

"I've said it. Now get the girl in here so we can hear her side of it."

It took over an hour for Governor Haydin to prove to his own satisfaction that Lea had vanished. The settled portion of Trowbri covered a limited area and everyone could be reached by phone. No one had seen her, or knew where she was. She was gone. Bron had faced this fact long before the governor would admit it—and he knew what had to be done. He slumped back in the chair, half-dozing, with his shoes off and his feet propped on Jasmine's warm flank. The little pig was out like a light, sleeping the sleep of the just.

"She's gone," Haydin said, switching off the last call. "How can it be? She couldn't have had anything to do with your being attacked."

"She could have—if she were forced into it."

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"What are you talking about?"

"I'm just guessing, but it makes sense. Suppose her brother is not dead . . ."

"What are you saying?"

"Let me finish. Suppose her brother is alive, but in deadly danger. And she had the chance to save him if she did as ordered—which was to get me here. Give the girl credit, I don't think she knew they meant to kill me. She must have put up a fight, that's why she was taken away, too."

"What do you know, Wurber?" Haydin shouted. "Tell me—everything. I'm governor here and I have a right to know."

"And know you shall—when I have anything more than hunches and guesses to give you. This attack, and the kidnapping, means that someone is unhappy about my presence, which also means that I am getting close. I'm going to speed things up and see if I can catch these 'ghosts' offguard."

"Do you think there is a connection between all this and the Ghost Plateau?"

"I *know* there is. That's why I want the word circulated in the morning that I am moving into my homestead tomorrow. Make sure everyone knows where it is."

"Where?"

"On the Ghost Plateau—where else?"

"That's suicide!"

"Not really. I have some guesses as to what happened up there, and some defenses—I hope. I also have my team, and they've proven themselves twice today. It will be taking a chance, but I'm going to have to take a chance if we ever hope to see Lea alive again."

Haydin clenched his fists on the desktop and made up his mind. "I can stop this if I want to—but I won't if you do it my way. Full radio connection, armed guards, the copters standing by . . ."

"No, sir, thank you very much but I remember what happened to the last bunch that tried it that way."

"Then—I'll go with you myself. I'm responsible for Lea. You'll take me, or you won't go."

Bron smiled. "Now that's a deal, Guv. I could use a helping hand, and maybe a witness. Things are going to get pretty busy on the plateau tonight. But no guns."

"That's suicide."

"Just remember the first expedition, and do it my way. I'm leaving most of my equipment behind. I imagine you can arrange to have it trucked to a warehouse until we get back. I think you'll find I have a good reason for what I'm doing."

Bron managed to squeeze in over ten hours sleep because he felt he was going to need it. By noon the truck had come and gone and they were on their way. Governor Haydin was dressed for the occasion, in hunting boots and rough clothes and he moved right out with them. Not that the pace was so fast, they went

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at the speed of the slowest piglet, and there was much noisy comment from all sides and grabbing of quick snacks from the roadside. They took the same course as the original expedition, a winding track that led up to the plateau in easy stages, for the most part running beside a fast river of muddy water. Bron pointed to it.

"Is this the river that runs through the plateau?" he asked.

Haydin nodded. "This is the one, it comes down from that range of mountains back there."

Bron nodded, then ran to rescue a squealing suckling from a crack in the rocks into which it had managed to wedge itself. They moved on.

By sunset they had set up camp—in the glade just next to the one where the previous expedition had met its end.

"Do you think this is a good idea?" Haydin asked.

"The best," Bron told him. "It's the perfect spot for our needs." He eyed the sun which was close to the horizon. "Let's eat now, I want everything squared away by dark."

Bron had opened a tremendous tent, but it was sparsely furnished, two folding chairs and a battery-powered light to be exact.

"Isn't this a little on the spartan side?" Haydin asked.

"I see no reason to bring equipment forty-five light-years just to have it destroyed. We've obviously set up camp, that's all that is important. The equipment I need is in here." He tapped a small plastic sack that hung from his shoulder. "Now—chow's up."

Their table was an empty ration box that had held the pigs' dinner. A good officer always sees to his troops first, so the animals had been fed. Bron put two self-heating dinners on the box, broke their seals, and handed Haydin a plastic fork. It was almost dark by the time they had finished, when Bron leaned out through the open end of the tent and whistled for Curly and Moe. The two boars arrived at full charge and left grooves in the dirt as they skidded to a halt next to him.

"Good boys," he said, scratching their bristly skulls. They grunted happily and rolled their eyes up at him. "They think I'm their mother, you know." He waited placidly while Haydin fought with his expression, his face turning red in the process. "That may sound a little funny, but it's true. They were removed from their litter at birth and I raised them. So I'm 'imprinted' as their parent. This is the only way I can be absolutely safe around them, since intelligent as they are, they are still quick-tempered and deadly beasts. It also means that I'm safe as long as they are around. If anyone so much as threatened me, he would be disemboweled within the second. I'm telling you this so you won't try anything foolish. Now, would you kindly hand over that gun you promised not to bring?"

Haydin's hand jumped towards

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his hip pocket, and stopped just as suddenly as both boars turned towards the sudden movement. Moe was salivating with happiness at the head-scratching and a drop of saliva collected and dropped from the tip of one ten-inch tusk.

"I need it for my own protection . . ." Haydin protested.

"You're better protected without it. Take it out, slowly."

Haydin reached back gingerly and took out a compact energy pistol, then tossed it over to Bron. Bron caught it and hung it on the hook next to the light. "Now empty your pockets," he said. "I want everything metallic dumped onto the box."

"What are you getting at?"

"We'll talk about it later, we don't have time now. Dump."

Haydin looked at the boars and emptied out his pockets, while Bron did the same. They left a collection of coins, keys, knives and small instruments on the box.

"We can't do anything now about the eyelets in your boots," Bron said, "but I don't think that they'll cause much trouble. I took the precaution of wearing elastic-sided boots."

It was dark now and Bron drove his charges into the woods nearby, spreading them out under the trees a good hundred yards from the clearing. Only Queeny, the intelligent sow, remained behind, dropping down heavily next to Bron's stool.

"I demand an explanation," said Governor Haydin.

"Don't embarrass me, Guv, I'm just working on guesses so far. If nothing has happened by morning, I'll give you an explanation—and my apology. Isn't she a beauty?" he added, nodding towards the massive hog at his feet.

"I'm afraid I might use another adjective myself."

"Well don't say it out loud. Queeny's English is pretty good and I don't want her feelings hurt. Misunderstanding, that's all it is. People call pigs dirty, but that's only because they have been made to live in filth. They're naturally quite clean and fastidious animals. They can be fat, they have a tendency to be sedentary and obese—just like people—so they can put on weight if they have the diet for it. In fact they are more like human beings than any other animal. They get ulcers like us and heart trouble the same way we do. Like man, they have hardly any hair on their bodies and even their teeth are similar to ours—their temperaments, too. Centuries ago an early physiologist by the name of Pavlov, who used to experiment with dogs, tried to do the same thing with pigs. But as soon as he placed them on the operating table they would squeal at the top of their lungs and thrash about. He said they were 'inherently hysterical' and went back to working with dogs. Which shows you even the best men have a blind spot. The pigs weren't

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hysterical—they were plain sensible—it was the dogs who were being dim. The pigs reacted just the way a man might if they tried to tie him down for some quick vivisection . . . What is it, Queeny?"

Bron added this last as Queeny suddenly raised her head, her ears extended, and grunted.

"Do you hear something?" Bron asked. The pig grunted again, a rising tone, and climbed to her feet. "Does it sound like engines coming this way?" Queeny nodded her ponderous head in a very human *yes*.

"Get into the woods, back under the trees!" Bron shouted, hauling Haydin to his feet. "Do it fast—or you're dead."

They ran, headlong, and were among the trees when a distant, rising whine could be heard. Haydin started to ask something but was pushed face first into the leaves as a whining, roaring shape floated into the clearing, occulted blackly against the stars. It was anything but ghostly—but what was it? A swirl of leaves and debris swept over them and Haydin felt something pulling at his legs so that they jumped about of their own accord. He tried to ask a question but his words were drowned out as Bron blew on a plastic whistle and shouted:

"Curly, Moe—*attack!*"

He pulled a stick-like object out of his pack at the same moment and threw it out into the clearing. It hit, popped, and burst into eye-searing flame, a flare of some kind.

The dark shape was a machine, that was obvious enough, round, black and noisy, at least ten feet across, floating a foot above the ground, with a number of circular disks mounted around its edge. One of them swung towards the tent and there was a series of explosive, popping sounds as the tent seemed to explode and fall to the ground.

There was only a moment to see this before the attacking forms of the boars appeared from the opposite side of the clearing. Their speed was incredible as, heads down and legs churning, they dove at the machine. One of them arrived a fraction of a second before the other and crashed into the machine's flank. There was a metallic clang and the shriek of tortured machinery as it was jarred back, bent, almost tipped over.

The boar on the far side took instant advantage of this, his intelligence as quick as his reflexes, and without slowing hurled himself into the air and over the side and into the open top of the machine. Haydin looked on appalled as the first boar did the same thing, the machine was almost on the ground now due either to ruined machinery or the animal's weight, climbing the side and vanishing into the interior. Above the roar of the engine could be heard crashes and metallic tearing—and high-pitched screaming. Something clattered and tore and

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the sound of the engines died away with a descending moan. As the sound lessened a second machine could be heard approaching.

"Another coming!" Bron shouted, blasting on his whistle as he jumped to his feet. One of the boars popped its head up from the ruins of the machine, then leaped out. The other was still noisily at work. The first boar catapulted himself towards the approaching sound and was on the spot when the machine appeared at the edge of the clearing, leaping and attacking, twisting his tusks into the thing. Something tore and a great black length of material hung down. The machine lurched and the operator must have seen the ruin of the first one, because it skidded in a tight circle and vanished back in the direction it had come.

Bron lit a second flare and tossed it out as the first one flickered. They were two-minute flares and the entire action—from beginning to end—had happened in less than that time. He walked over to the ruined machine and Haydin hurried after him. The boar leaped to the ground and stood there panting, then wiped its tusks on the ground.

"What is it?" Haydin asked.

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"A hovercraft," Bron said. "They aren't seen very much these days—but they do have their uses. They can move over any kind of open country or water, and they don't leave tracks. But they can't go over or through forest."

"You knew this thing was coming—that's why you had us hide in the woods?"

"I suspected this. And I suspected them." He pointed inside the wrecked hovercraft and Haydin recoiled in shock.

"Blood, green blood, and they're dead. Gray skin, pipe-stem limbs. I've never seen any, just pictures, but could they be . . ."

"Sulbani. You're right. The evidence seemed to point to them, but I couldn't be sure. The use of frequency weapons is typical of them." He kicked at one of the bent disks, not unlike a microwave aerial. "That was the first clue. They have supersonic projectors in the forest, broadcasting on a wavelength that is inaudible but causes a feeling of tension and uneasiness in most animals. That was the ghostly aura that kept people away from this plateau most of the time." He whistled a signal for the herd to assemble. "Animals, as well as men, will move away from the source and they used it to chase some of the nastier wild life towards us. When it didn't work and we came back they sent in the more powerful stuff. Look at your shoes—and at this lantern."

Haydin gasped. The eyelets had vanished from his boots and ragged pieces of lace hung from the torn openings. The lantern, like the metal equipment of the lost expedition, was squeezed and bent out of shape.

"Magnostriction," Bron said. "They were projecting a contracting and expanding magnetic field of an incredible number of gauss. These fields are used to shape metal in factories and the technique works just as well in the field. That, and these projectors to finish the job. They're sonic or microwave. Even a normal scan radar will give you a

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burn if you stand too close to it, and some supersonic wavelengths can turn water to vapor and explode organic material. That's what they did to your people who camped here. Swept in suddenly, caught them in the tents surrounded by their own equipment, which exploded and crunched and helped to wipe them out. Now let's get going."

"I don't understand what this means, I . . ."

"Later. We have to catch the one that got away."

On the side of the clearing, where the machine had disappeared, a ragged length of black plastic was discovered. "Part of the skirt from the hovercraft," Bron said. "Confines the air and gives more lift. We'll follow them with this." He held out the fabric to Queeny and Jasmine, and the other pigs that pressed up. "As you know dogs track by odor that hangs in the air, and pigs have just as good or better noses. In fact hunting pigs were used in England for years, and pigs are also trained to smell out truffles. There they go!"

Grunting and squealing the pack started away into the darkness and the two men stumbled after them. Haydin had to stop after a few yards and bind his shoes together with strips from his handkerchief before he could go on. He held Bron's belt and Bron had his fingers hooked into the thick bristles that formed a crest on Curly's spine, and they pushed through the forest like this. The hovercraft had to go through open country or their nightmare run would have been impossible.

When a darker mass of mountains loomed ahead Bron whistled the herd to him. "Stay," he ordered. "Stay with Queeny. Curly, Moe and Jasmine—with me."

They went more slowly now until the grasslands died away in a broken scree of rock at the foot of a nearly vertical cliff. To their left they could make out the black gorge of the river and hear it rushing by below.

"You told me those things can't fly," Haydin said.

"They can't. Jasmine, follow the trail."

The little pig, head up and sniffing, trotted steadily across the broken rock and pointed to the bare side of the cliff.

"Could there possibly be a concealed entrance here?" Haydin asked, feeling the rough texture of the rock.

"There certainly could be—and we have no time to go looking for the key. Get behind those rocks, way over there, while I open this thing up."

He took blocks of a claylike substance from his pack and placed them against the rock, where they remained, over the spot that Jasmine had indicated. Then he pushed a fuse into the explosive, pulled the igniter—and ran. He had just

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thrown himself down with the others when flame ripped the sky and the ground heaved under them: a spatter of rocks fell on all sides.

They ran forward through the dust and saw light spilling out through a tall crevice in the rock. The boars threw themselves against it and it widened. Once through they saw that a metal door was fastened to a section of rock and could swing outwards to give access to the tunnel they were standing in.

"Attack," Bron said, pointing down the tunnel. "Kill animal things with weapons, try not to kill all."

The boars were gone and the men ran after them. By the time they arrived the battle was over. The Sulbani were knocked out and the complex controls they were working at destroyed for the most part. There were two survivors and under the watchful eyes of the boars they opened the metal door to a cell.

"I never thought anyone would come," Lea Davies said as she stepped out, half supported by a tall man with the same coloring and eyes.

"Huw Davies?" Bron asked.

"Yes, he is," Haydin said. "But what is happening here? What is this all about?"

"A mine," Huw said, pointing towards a door in the far wall of the room. "A uranium mine—all in secret and it has been running for years. I don't know how they're getting the metal out, but they mine and partially refine it here, all automatic machinery, and powder the slag and dump it into the river out there."

"I'll tell you what happens then," Bron said. "When they have a cargo it's lifted off by spacer. The Sulbani have very big ideas about moving out of their area and controlling a bigger portion of space. But they are short of power metals and Earth has been keeping it that way. One of the reasons this planet was settled was that it is near the Sulbani sector and, while we didn't need the uranium, we didn't want it falling into the Sulbani's hands. The Patrol had no idea that they were getting their uranium from Trowbri—though they knew it was coming from some place—but it was a possibility. When the governor here sent in his request for aid it became an even stronger possibility."

"I still don't understand it," Haydin said. "We would have detected any ships coming to the planet, our radar functions well."

"I'm sure it functions fine—but these creatures have at least one human accomplice who sees to it that the landings are concealed."

"Human . . .!" Haydin gasped, then knotted his fists at the thought. "It's not possible. A traitor to the human race. Who could it be?"

"That's obvious," Bron said, "now that you have been eliminated as a possibility."

"Me!"

"You were a good suspect, in the

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perfect position to cover things up, that's why I was less than frank with you. But you knew nothing about the hovercraft raid and would have been killed if I hadn't pulled you down, so that took you off the lists of suspects. Leaving the obvious man, Reymon the radio operator."

"That's right," Lea said. "He let me talk to Huw on the phone, then made me call you or he would have Huw killed. He didn't say why, I didn't know . . ."

"You couldn't have." Bron smiled at her. "He isn't much of a killer and must have been following the Sulbani instructions to get rid of me. He really earned his money by not seeing their ships on radar. And by making sure that the radio communication with Huw's party was cut off when the Sulbani attacked. He probably recorded the signals and gave the murderers an hour or two to do their work before he broadcast the radios' cutting off. That would have helped the mystery."

"Reymon," Governor Haydin said, clenching and unclenching his hands as he looked down at the boars. "Your pigs have had all the fun up to now, and I give them full credit. But let me take care of Reymon myself, without their help."

"You'll have my help," Huw said grimly. "It's my job as well."

"I'll need him as a witness," Bron said.

"He'll be alive," Haydin assured him. "And I can guarantee not only a witness but a complete confession. This settlement has a score to settle with Mr. Reymon."

"Agreed. And I hope you'll give a favorable report about this P.I.G. operation, Governor."

"The absolute best," Haydin said, and looked down at Jasmine who was curled up at his feet chewing on a bar of Sulbani rations. "In fact, I'm almost ready to swear off eating pork for the rest of my life." ■

The Analytical Laboratory / March 1967

PLACE	STORY	AUTHOR	POINTS
1.	The Time-Machined Saga (Part One)	*Harry Harrison*	1.57
2.	In The Shadow	*Michael Karageorge*	3.03
3.	Radical Center	*Mack Reynolds*	3.12
4.	The Uninvited Guest	*Christopher Anvil*	3.32
5.	The Compleat All-American	*R. C. FitzPatrick*	3.72

I'd like to call your attention to the unusual point-score distribution in this An Lab. Harry Harrison's "The Time-Machined Saga" (Part One) took first place so solidly—so nearly unanimously—that it has a point-score of 1.57, while no other story has a point-score under 3. That, my friends, constitutes a "resounding vote of approval"—especially with Karageorge, Reynolds and Anvil as opposition. THE EDITOR

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Kelly Freas

Compound Interest

A truly competent man—whether general, scientist or business executive—may be thrown for a loss by an unexpected and unpredictable event. But his competence becomes apparent when he then figures out how to use that unexpected for his own constructive operations . . .

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

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Nels Krojac lay flat on his back as the dizziness wore off, the ringing in his ears died away, and the tingling of his hands and feet told of returning circulation. Carefully he sat up, his gaze taking in the wide bed he lay on, the drawers along the walls to left and right, the emergency control console that filled the end wall, and, beside the bed, the communications screens that could put him in touch with any part of the ship by snapping a switch.

He sat at the edge of the bed, and the mirror on the right-hand wall showed him a broad-shouldered man with dark hair, massive chest, and watchful blue eyes, wearing a dark-blue dressing gown with dragon design on the chest. The slightly-stubbled face was lean, broad-boned, and hard, and he recognized that face from long familiarity. What he didn't recognize was the pallor of skin and hesitancy of expression as he tested his legs.

Cautiously, he walked the length of the room to the foot of the huge console, then back to the bed and the communications screens, back once more to the console, then to the door on the left wall of the room below the console, and back to the bed to look again in the mirror.

The paleness was fading away. Now he looked like a man who has walked into a glass door, and has just staggered back to his feet. A few seconds consideration told him it would never do to show that face to the universe.

He paced the room, opened the left-hand door, to his private swimming pool, where the water was pale-blue, still, and inviting, but he was afraid to use it. And then the realization that he was afraid struck home. He walked back to the bed, and glared angrily in the mirror.

There. *Now* he looked like himself again.

He snapped on the bedside screen. A long-faced suave-looking individual with lightly-oiled wavy hair took a cigarette from his mouth, put it out in a nearby ash tray, and still exhaling smoke said, "Yes, Mr. Krojac?"

"Reagan, what happened down there yesterday while I was explaining the contract to that gang of feline aliens?"

"They watched every move you made, and they looked at you as if they were trying to drill their way into your head with their eyes. They look so much like tigers anyway, that I had my hand in my pocket, gripping that fusion gun, all the time we were there."

"Did they stare much at you?"

"Just for a few seconds."

"Did they seem to understand the contract?"

Reagan hesitated. "The impression I got was that they knew something was being put over on them, but they didn't know what. Anyway —they agreed to it."

". . . With the verbal proviso that the written contract must match the verbal explanation."

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Reagan shrugged. "That has no legal force."

"Yeah," said Krojac sourly, remembering what had happened a few minutes ago. The dizziness hit him every time he planned to bend the contract terms. "Where do we stand if we *do* follow the verbal understanding?"

Reagan looked jarred, as if someone had suggested that he rob his mother.

"Well, we . . . I certainly wouldn't recommend *that*."

"We'd lose money on the deal?"

"It's worse than that. We're at the crux of a pyramiding of credit. We've got enormous assets and enormous debts. So long as the assets are part of a functioning concern, they're worth more than the debts. Split up and sold piecemeal for cash, they wouldn't cover half the indebtedness. We've *had* to go this far in debt to get a strategic position in this end of space."

Krojac nodded. "Otherwise, Reed & Osborne would have moved in."

"Exactly. Now, Reed & Osborne is conservative in their financing. To have blocked us directly would have required heavy risks. That company prefers to let *us* take the risks, and reach an agreement with us later if we succeed, or buy our depreciated assets if we fail. Reed & Osborne's position is solid in the settled regions. It can afford to move in here just fast enough to force us to extend ourselves, or accept a permanent second-class position."

"Yes," said Krojac. That, he thought, was always the way it was. To try for safety meant that others took the big risks—and *some* of those others succeeded, and got the big gains. They were the first-rates, and with their resulting big assets, they could grip the central positions, and dominate the scene with ease. And, he told himself, the only way to break that dominance was to have big enough assets yourself to take big risks and make big gains, and in turn secure a dominant position. But since those already dominant would so cramp you that you could never acquire big assets, what was there to do but plan your move, and then borrow the assets to carry it out? In which case, if you made one bad slip, the whole house of cards folded up.

On the screen, Reagan shrugged. "We've done very well until now. We've got our foundation solidly laid. We've got the properties and some of the necessary contracts for development and future use. But we're stretched to the limit. The first loans are now coming due. We're going to be watched very carefully. *If* we pay those loans on time, then we'll have no trouble with future loans. But, if we *fail* to pay those loans, the word will go around that we're in trouble. God help us then."

Krojac nodded soberly. Here was the clinch. It was one thing to see the opportunity, conceive a plan, and carry the plan as far as ordinary

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luck, energy, thought, and determination would carry it. It was another thing to have that plan reach the point where it should just start to bear fruit, and then see it pile into a stone wall.

"How far's our work behind schedule, down on the planet?"

"Just three days. But when those colonists start coming through here, we've got to have the facilities ready. Otherwise, instead of pay, we're going to get a penalty. Either pay, or penalty, is figured per head, and the numbers passing through here will be enormous."

Krojac thought it over. The main new colonization route through this sector passed nearby before branching, and that had seemed to be his opportunity. What he needed was a quick return that would pay off immediate debts. Colonists outbound on the longer government routes were given a chance to rest and make up deficiencies in their equipment before the final stage of the trip. The government would gladly pay a private enterpriser who would supply the rest-and-refit facilities.

Krojac knew an Earth-type planet ideally situated, and occupied only by monster carnivores and herbivores, and a kind of big-boned tiger-like creature with no visible technology, civilization, or other accomplishments. All he had to do was to get the refit contract, and he could build on this planet, and have a sure source of cash income. He decided to do it.

The first shock came when the government put the refit contract up for bids, and Reed & Osborne publicly announced its intention of bidding.

"Now what?" Krojac demanded.

Reagan shook his head. "I'm afraid their move is obvious."

"Bid at just what they think it will cost?"

"Right. Then whether they get it or not, they won't lose a cent; while if *we* don't get it, we'll be denied our immediate source of cash. Yet to get it, we'll have to bid *below cost*. The result will be that we'll be driven to the wall. And when we fold up, Reed & Osborne will buy us out cheap, for an enormous overall profit."

Krojac tested the logic of it. It fit like a sharp knife between the ribs. "There's just one thing. This is a *long-term contract*."

"Yes. They can't plan on renegotiating it every year or two."

"That means they'll have to figure planetary rights over a long period. After they've sold them out, they'll still have expenses. If we *should* live through this, they don't want a drawn-out drain on their resources."

"Hm-m-m, that's right. Let's get Sheaster's opinion on this."

A moment later, a shrewd face looked at them from the screen. "Sure, when you take a government R. and R. Contract, you get full planetary settlement rights. That's

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thrown in free. It doesn't cost the government a cent . . . Yes, if you've got space left over, and you always have lots of it, you can sell homesteads to the settlers, and the government will pay you the settlers' outbound shipping cost." Sheaster's eyes narrowed. "But wait a minute, now. You can't extrapolate the short-term gains onto a long-term basis. What happens is, you get a fast flow of cash while the nearby land is used up, then you run into expenses. You've got to deliver the settler fairly close to the homestead. You've got to lay out a system for the homestead boundaries. You've got to make the first year's supplies available. You run into diminishing returns pretty fast when you start shuttling them over mountain ranges against gravity, and hauling out supplies. It turns into a mass of details, and whether a river flows north or south can make all the difference."

"How's Reed & Osborne going to figure it?"

"The same way, only more so. They don't want it. They just want to saw off the limb we're climbing on."

"We'll be safe to figure they won't bid below their idea of average *long-term* cost?"

Sheaster thought it over. "Yes. But *you* think we can cut under their bid, count on short-term sales to settlers, and have cash from the government? Sure. Later, we'll have a steady drain till the contract runs out, but by then we can cover that from other sources." Sheaster squinted at the screen. "Yes, I think that's it."

Krojac said, "Is there any place we can get in a trap?"

"If we make a wrong guess as to costs, sure. Or if it turns out there's a 'sentient race' on the planet."

"We've got the survey reports. They haven't classified it yet, but there's no sign of that."

"No. But if that happens, we could wind up with the contract and no planet. When there's a 'sentient race', you have to get their permission."

"The initial recommendation was to classify it A-1 except for the big carnivores on the planet."

Sheaster nodded. "We can't eliminate chance. If we don't do this, we take a bigger risk of failing."

"Just what *I* think," said Krojac. "O.K., we'll bid slightly below cost."

And, Krojac thought, sitting on the edge of his bed ten months later, it had worked like a charm, until about six weeks ago. He had won the contract. He'd gotten ready to start work. But then it developed that the chief of the classification unit on the planet thought the planet's tigerlike race was sentient; he also thought it was potentially deadly.

Since the classification chief produced no proof for this belief, the obvious answer was that Reed & Osborne was quietly paying a little

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something into a hidden account somewhere. The simplest counter was to try to outbid Reed & Osborne, and when that didn't work, to pull every string available to force the local official, whose name was Lindell, to make up his mind.

Lindell, however, did *not* make up his mind, but instead sent back worried reports of possible future trouble, along with every conceivable kind of proof that the local species was neither sentient nor actually dangerous. These reports, copies of which quickly found their way to Nels Krojac, all but drove him wild. Reed & Osborne, through Lindell, had him in a box.

"All right," said Krojac finally, "there's nothing to do but send the men down there anyway, and fight it out in court afterward. Maybe by then, at least, we'll have the money to pay the fines."

Sheaster nodded. "We *might* beat him. This is so irrational, it *must* be he's been bribed."

Reagan said, "He can't actually stop us. His base is set up to fight off the carnivores. But that's all the weapons he's got, except for lightly-armed surveyor-probes."

Krojac nodded. "And his base is far enough away so that's no bother."

"Except," said Sheaster thoughtfully, "there's just one thing."

"Now what?"

"He *could* call in the Space Force."

Krojac could see the incandescent sparks dance before his eyes. "That's all we'd need."

"*Agh,*" said Reagan, "what's the likelihood of that?"

"With this Lindell," said Sheaster. "I'm not so sure."

There was a silence, then Krojac shrugged.

"What else *can* we do?"

"The Space Force shoots with guns," said Sheaster. "It's a difference of going bust and getting killed. Maybe you don't care, but *I* do."

Reagan said, "We don't *know* he'll call in the Space Force."

Sheaster pursed his lips doubtfully.

Krojac nodded. "Reagan's right. As it stands, we're beat. We've *got* to force the issue. Meanwhile, in case he does call in the Space Force, we've got to dig up every complication, legal precedent, and argument for delay we can think of. We might make it so complicated the Space Force would think it lacked jurisdiction."

Reagan said thoughtfully, "I've got a nephew on one of those ships —I think he's second-in-command of a patrol squadron. I think *he'd* see reason."

"If he can get us out of this," said Krojac earnestly, "I'd be grateful, in five figures. You and he can split it anyway you want."

Reagan said, "I don't know. It's no use unless he's in the right squadron."

"Maybe we could cut his C.O. in.

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This thing is worth plenty to me."

"Yeah," said Reagan, "but there're a lot of patrol squadrons out there, and I'm just not sure—"

"Listen," said Sheaster, "go easy about cutting the C.O. in. There's a certain type we don't want to fool with. Let me get it across to you, these boys play with *guns*."

Krojac said, "What do you think those things are we've got mounted all over the ship. We paid plenty for those."

"Do you have the fire-control apparatus, the combat computers, the disciplined crew—"

"I'm not talking about fighting a war with them."

"I'm glad to hear that, at least. But what I'm saying again is, there's a type we'd better not come up against. Forget about cutting the C.O. in."

"Everybody likes money."

"There's a kind that likes opposition better. They swim against the current. Let's not *us* make the current they swim against."

"Nuts," said Krojac. "We've got to resist to the limit, and give them every chance to lose their nerve. *Obviously*, we can't fight the Space Force. But we *can* drum up so many legal specters and so many complications that maybe we can take the initiative away from them."

Reagan said, "*If* Lindell calls them in."

"Yes," said Krojac, "*if* he does. O.K. We put the men down."

Reagan nodded. "I'll take care of it."

The following day, Lindell called in the Space Force.

Sheaster said worriedly, "This is getting pretty bad. We've got the Midas touch with a reverse twist. Everything we put our hand to turns to dirt."

Reagan was frowning. "I don't know. My nephew is second-in-command of Squadron 2337. The squadron that answered Lindell's call is 2337."

Krojac beamed. "That could be the end of our troubles right here."

"I talked to him . . . just a friendly chat," said Reagan, "and I think he got the picture."

Sheaster said forebodingly, "He's going to bribe the C.O., eh?"

"He's going to try to get him to see reason."

The screen lit up. "Sir, a Lieutenant colonel Doyle, commanding Squadron 2337, wants to speak to Mr. Krojac."

"Fast work," said Krojac, smiling.

"Hold on," said Reagan. "Hannie hasn't had time to see him yet. This Doyle will just commit himself against us and that will make it harder all around."

Krojac glanced back at the screen. "Tell him I'm busy, and can't speak with him right now."

"Yes, sir." The screen blanked.

A formal message from Doyle of Squadron 2337 promptly arrived,

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warning that any construction or earth-moving work on Marshak III had been banned, and the Space Force would uphold the ban, using whatever degree of force was necessary.

"Hannie evidently hasn't gotten to him yet," said Reagan.

Krojac glanced at Sheaster. "O.K. Fire your legal broadside."

Sheaster promptly sent out a complex legal document sixty-two pages long.

Lieutenant colonel Doyle of Squadron 2337 sent back a sharp message reiterating his first warning.

Krojac looked at the two messages. "Something tells me Hannie is never going to convince *this* boy."

"It certainly doesn't look promising," said Reagan. "Well, do we go ahead with the next step?"

"There's nothing else *to* do. If we act invincible enough, maybe we'll even convince Doyle."

Reagan called Doyle of Squadron 2337, using a trick screen that showed, in the background, realistic recorded views of a prominent senator and a Space Force general. Reagan bore down heavy with an air of power, and the implied warning that Doyle was seriously endangering his career.

Doyle watched in silence. Shortly after the call, Krojac received a third warning, varying from the previous two only in trivial details of the wording.

Sheaster shook his head. "This boy won't stop. He's coming right through."

Reagan said, "What we've done so far has been like trying to tie him up with rubber bands."

"With enough rubber bands," said Krojac, "we may do it. All right, start calling Doyle. First put on somebody to throw another legal block into him. Then put on . . . let's see . . . Root is good at this. Yes, put Root on to explain to Doyle, in the most reasonable way, why it is we've *got* to put the men down there. After all, this wasn't our idea. Lindell is forcing our hand. If that doesn't work, hit him with the legal stuff again. Then somewhere in there, we want to get it across that he's got a good spot waiting for him with us if he's reasonable about this. Then dig up the highest-ranking ex-Space Force officer we've got that has any power of persuasion, and have him disagree with Doyle's interpretation of the technicalities. This ex-officer has got to look like he's living in the lap of luxury. See, to give Doyle a little incentive. *He* made it. So can Doyle."

Sheaster put his head in his hands.

Reagan said hopefully, "Drop by drop, we'll wear him down."

Krojac nodded. "Where's that trideo actress we picked up. We'll put her on next, and in case he doesn't go for that, we'll hit him again with some more legal stuff."

"O.K.," said Reagan. "If we

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pile it on fast enough, maybe we'll bury him in it."

They promptly put the plan in action.

Doyle disagreed with Krojac's legal specialist, listened patiently to Root, stated that regulations required him to act as he was acting, informed a new legal team that he was acting under regulations, showed no indication that he was eager for a bribe or afraid of Krojac, and listened unimpressed to his "brother Space Force officer." Reagan never got a chance to try the actress on Doyle, because just before she was to go on, word came in that Squadron 2337 was entering a "potential war zone," and would henceforth maintain complete communicator silence.

"'Potential war zone,'" said Sheaster. "That's *us*. Do you realize that?"

Reagan shook his head. "It looked hopeful for a few seconds now and then, but the fact is he went through that stuff like a fusion beam through an overstretched balloon."

"The trouble is," said Krojac, "it's all been one hundred percent bluff. We don't have anything to fight *with*." He frowned. "Wait a minute."

"What?"said Reagan.

"We're armed. I'll bet this ship, together with the *Star Chaser*, mounts more firepower than the whole pipsqueak squadron. What do you bet one of our ships outweighs a dreadnought?"

"Wait a minute, Nels." Reagan said. "We're *not* going to fight the Space Force. If you're turning pirate, count me out."

"No, no," said Krojac. "Do you think I'm nuts? Who's planning to *fight* them? But this Doyle must be under plenty of pressure by now. He's going on, clinging to regulations, but he's wondering about a lot of things."

"No," said Sheaster. "He's not wondering about anything. He's got his orders, and that's that. He's *not* wondering."

"He's wondering," said Krojac stubbornly, "and he's *uncertain*. Meanwhile, we've still got to get this work done. He's going to get here about the time those earth-moving machines get set up. If we just let him go down and block us, we lose the chance to fulfill the contract. Lindell sits on the classification till the last minute, and we're *ended*. There won't be time to do the job."

"We'll still be alive," said Sheaster.

"Suppose," said Krojac, "this space kid and his popboats find a ship bigger than a dreadnought waiting for them, its big fusion guns already centered on them, and another big ship just coming up over the curve of the planet—*then* what?"

Reagan suggested. "They'll try to contact us."

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"We won't answer. What can they do?"

Reagan frowned. "Not being a Space Force colonel, I don't know. They *might* think it was too dangerous to force the issue."

Sheaster put one hand over his eyes, turned away, then turned back with a sudden thrust of the hand to the side.

"Look. Let me try again. *There are different kinds of people.* There is one kind that when you pull a gun on him, you better be ready to shoot him."

"Who's 'pulling a gun'?" said Krojac hotly. "Our guns are *already there.* We've got a legal right to move them around however we feel like it. Look, this Doyle is already up against a lot of pressure. We'll give him an *excuse to not interfere.* This Doyle is a military man, and military men respect guns."

Sheaster shook his head gloomily.

Reagan scowled. "It *sounds* as if it might work. But there's something about the way Doyle has acted so far—"

"All right," said Krojac. "What can we do if we *don't* do this?"

"That's a point," said Reagan slowly. "O.K. We'll try to *scare* them off."

Krojac's larger ship, the *Empire,* was ready when Squadron 2337 appeared off the planet Marshak III. The *Empire* held the ships of Squadron 2337 in the automatic sights of her guns, and replied to no calls. Slowly and ominously, Krojac's other ship, the *Star Chaser,* rose up over the curve of the planet.

Squadron 2337 lit up like a mountain range of erupting volcanoes. Two of the squadron's ships streaked off at wide angles. Suddenly, a series of thuds jarred the *Empire.*

The first officer appeared on Nels Krojac's screen.

"Sir, the Space Force ships have put our guns out of action, and implanted heavy missiles in the ship."

"Implanted—what does that mean?"

"They've got missiles they can slam right through an unarmored hull. These smash through into the guts of the ship, and go off in a set time-interval unless the missile officer shuts off the timing device. We've just been warned these missiles will go off in ten minutes. There's a Space Force colonel on the screen talking to the captain now."

Krojac could feel his head spin. "I'll talk to him."

Krojac used on Doyle every device of word and manner to force some slight concession, or at least to gain a little time.

Doyle refused to yield an inch.

Krojac's captains surrendered their ships.

The ships were boarded and methodically searched, including Krojac's private quarters.

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"Well," said Sheaster, "*now* do you say he'll run away? I tell you, you don't bribe this kind and you don't scare him. Pull a gun on him, and you better shoot it."

"Are we dead?" said Krojac. "How could we know what he'd do without trying it? My ships surrendered to him—so what? The only charge he has against us is that we 'behaved in a menacing way,' or some such thing. I never said we were going to fight him."

"But where are we now?" said Sheaster.

"In a tough spot. Well, we'd have been in just as tough a spot if we'd said, 'Yes, sir,' when the first order came in. I don't aim to fold up just because somebody gives a threat. If they're going to fold me up, *they're* going to have to do the work. I won't do it for them."

Reagan said, "What about the work crews on the planet? Do we call them back up?"

"No. Have them go ahead."

"But—"

"But what? That's what this is all about, isn't it? If Doyle stops here and the work crews go ahead, *we win.*"

"With all the power Doyle has on tap—"

"It isn't enough that he's got the power. He's got to *use* it."

Reagan looked dazed. "The work crews go ahead?"

"That's right. No delay."

Reagan sent down the order.

The work crews promptly started out with their earth-moving machines.

Doyle with equal promptness set down a troop transport, and armed men blocked the earth-moving machines.

Krojac's tough work-crew chiefs obeyed orders and drove straight at the troops, ignoring commands to stop.

Doyle's troops fired warning shots over their heads.

Krojac's men ignored the warning and slammed straight ahead.

Doyle's troops lowered their guns, and opened fire on the machines themselves.

Then, and only then, was Krojac stopped.

"All right," he said, "they've stopped us. But never forget. *They* did it. *We* didn't. We've got nothing to be ashamed of. If you do your best, that's good enough."

"Nevertheless, we're stopped," said Reagan.

"O.K., but if I get licked, I want the other side to carry a few memories away. Now, what we've got to do is to find some way out. What's going to happen here? What's the setup. Is Doyle bought? Did Reed & Osborne get to him?"

"No," said Sheaster. "I keep trying to tell you, you don't *buy* that kind. They aren't for sale."

"Even with what Reed & Osborne have got?"

"Not if Reed & Osborne had ten times as much."

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Krojac frowned. "But they've got Lindell?"

"That I don't know. I thought so. Now I don't know. That he called Doyle in so fast doesn't exactly fit. Well . . . who knows? Maybe *he's* honest."

Krojac said exasperatedly, "How do you deal with honest men? You can't predict what they're going to do." He thought a minute. "All right, we'll train more work crews, and put the ships to work improvising more equipment. If Doyle and Lindell *are* honest, anything might happen."

The screen came on. "Sir, we've just got word there's an advanced linguistics computer, the LC-10,000, already on its way. It should get here tomorrow."

"What's the object of that?"

"If the locals have a complex language, then Lindell can rule that there's an anomalous situation here that needs further study—in that the natives have some advanced characteristics and some primitive characteristics. Then he can put the planet in the 'Unclassified' category and delay exploitation of it."

"Well, that fits. Let me know if anything more comes in."

"Yes, sir."

"Well," said Krojac, "that's a nice, neat trap. That could *really* string the thing out."

Reagan scowled. "What do they do if this computer doesn't cooperate?"

Krojac shook his head. "We'll go nuts trying to figure this out. How do you bribe a computer? Forget it. Get going on the work crews."

The next day, the situation took a series of twists none of them would have thought possible.

First, the infallible computer announced that the "speech" of the natives was nothing more than "simple repetitive syllables." This knocked the props out from under Lindell.

Second, the Space Force colonel, Doyle, walked over to a group of natives and succeeded in getting them to understand him.

Third, Lindell, himself stupefied by this development, let it be known that the natives appeared to communicate by "visual telepathy," by which he meant that they were able to transfer mental pictures to each other's minds, and had actually been able, though it was evidently a strain, to "talk" this way with humans. Lindell could now put the planet in the Unclassified category, and there was no predicting when it would get out of that category.

Fourth, the natives, communicating with Lindell, let it be known that they were agreeable to having the rest-and-refit center on the planet, providing they negotiated directly with the center's head man —who was Krojac.

Fifth, Krojac, gathering himself together after these jolts and surprises, went down to the planet and

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drove a bargain with the natives, who agreed to a reasonable rent, but flatly refused to allow permanent human settlement on the planet. Krojac, resorting to every subterfuge he could think of, managed to get the contract officially signed, with two tricky clauses in it.

Sixth, having got back up to his ship, Krojac began to plan how to use these clauses. At once, his ears began to ring, his hands and feet went numb, and everything went black.

The first time this happened, Krojac gave it up for a while. But he tried again. And again. With the same results.

The next day, Krojac tried once more. The same thing happened. He called Doyle on the screen, and Doyle was interested, but had no answer. Krojac decided he had had enough delay, and went to work to plan in earnest exactly what to do. When the dizziness came, he didn't stop.

This time, the effect was brutally powerful. It was after that, that Krojac paced the floor, unwilling to let his followers see his pale shaken facial expression. And it was then that he got Reagan on the screen to go over what had happened the day before.

Finally, Reagan, who still knew nothing of Krojac's dizziness, said, "But look, Nels, you've saved the situation with that contract. The cats may not like it, but that's not *our* worry. If *they* stop the colonists, we can get the Space Force in on *our* side."

"There's a little catch." Krojac explained what had happened.

Reagan stared at him. "Then we're stopped again?"

"It looks like it. I can't even *think* of letting those clauses be invoked, or it hits me."

Reagan shook his head. "Then we're still in the same position as before. What is it—a jinx?"

"I don't know. But we've got to do *something*. Listen, I'll call you back in a little while. I've got to think."

Krojac shut off the screen. For a moment, he found himself struggling with a host of doubts. Had he made the move too soon? Wasn't he really just a second-rate trying to puff himself up into a first-rate? Who was *he* to head the enterprise? Did he have, for instance, Reagan's financial know-how, or Sheaster's knowledge of people?

But the answers were right there. He had to move. It was now or never, because Reed & Osborne was moving in by calculated stages. As for whether he was first- or second-rate, he didn't have to think about that. The situation would answer that question. Any time he spent stewing over it would only influence the answer in the wrong direction. It was true that Reagan knew more about money, and Sheaster knew more about people —look how Sheaster had foreseen

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Doyle's reactions—but Krojac couldn't picture either of them at the head of the business.

Frowning, he wandered around the room as thoughts passed into and out of his field of consciousness. He thought about Sheaster, Doyle, Reed & Osborne, the creatures down on the planet, Reagan, the loans coming due, the colonists who would soon pass through here in a growing stream, and by some process of association, he was thinking of Sheaster's tycoon father, J. Harrison Sheaster.

"That kid of mine," the elder Sheaster had growled, "could make a hundred billion if he wanted to, but instead he thinks about *higher* things: The Law. But if that's what he's so interested in, I can't change it. The rule in business is—Get people what they want. That means you've first got to find out what they want, and second, find somebody to supply it. That's basic. Well, if the kid doesn't want it, isn't interested, I might as well save my breath. People think it's genius or willpower when somebody blasts his way to the top. They can't see that underneath it all, it's *interest*. Interest comes first."

The old man smiled. "*You* look interested. You know what's the best situation in business? When you find two separated sets of people, and each is interested in what the other can supply. Now, that's *compound* interest. You want to think about these things. The simple truths stand up when the hurricane sweeps away the fancy techniques. There are people who stand for the techniques, and *people who stand for the basic truths*. Without the first, you're in trouble. Without the second, you've got no foundation, nothing to tie to, and get swept along in the current. That's why sometimes the top people don't seem as slick as the people working for them. Think it over. Maybe someday you'll need this."

Now, in the big room with the huge control console at one end, Nels Krojac stood perfectly still, saw why he was running the business, and saw what his job had to be if they were going to win. Sheaster had used every legal technique to save them. Reagan had extended the financial techniques to the limit. Now he, Krojac, had to work on the basic elements of the situation. The words "trade," "interest," and "compound interest" occurred to him, and he began to analyze the situation.

Later that day, in one of the ship's powerful tenders, Krojac headed for the nearest subspace-jump point that would take him far from Marshak III and its tiger-like inhabitants. At intervals along the trip, in and out of subspace, he tried to think of using the two misleading clauses of the contract. Each time, he felt dizzy, heard his ears begin to ring, and his vision fade. Each time, he stopped, and the

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symptoms slowly faded away. Finally he was satisfied. "It's built-in. Distance doesn't affect it. Now for the tricky part."

As soon as he got back, Krojac sent Reagan down to set up a meeting with the natives. Then, prayerfully, since everything was now balanced on the brink of disaster, Krojac went down himself.

That same day, the natives changed their stand.

Human settlers *could* move into Marshak III, but they could settle only in a large region convenient to the rest-and-refit base. This was exactly where Krojac needed them to make his immediate profit. He came back up to the ship exhausted but triumphant. Reagan and Sheaster looked at him with awe.

"That's just in time," said Reagan. "A couple days later and we'd have been finished. In fact, right this minute I can hear the corks popping and the champagne fizzing at Reed & Osborne."

Krojac sank into a chair. "The news will taste like vinegar."

Sheaster stared at Krojac. "You remind me of my father. They had him finished half-a-dozen times. But it never took. Each time, the ground moved around under their feet, and when it got through moving, he was in the clear."

"How," Reagan demanded, "did you ever persuade the locals to allow settlement?"

"I convinced them they could buy the land back later. This is a rest-and-refit center, and anyone can go farther out if he pays his fare to the government. Well, if the locals offer a settler enough, it's worth his while to move. Most settlers are convinced it's better farther on anyway."

"But wait a minute," said Reagan, scowling. "Where do the locals *get* this money? Their rent for the R. and R. site isn't going to cover it. Do we have to pay them some big—"

"We don't pay them anything. They pay their own way."

"What with? They've got no technology, no skills, no—"

"No skills?" said Krojac. He tossed across a sheaf of handwritten papers headed, "Marshak Contract Guaranty Corporation. Nels Krojac, Honorary President. Erkbat N. W. Marshak, President and Chairman of the Board. Motto: 'When we enforce it, they don't break it.' Moderate fees. Offices on principal planets."

Sheaster snorted. "*Any* contract can be broken—or bent into a pretzel. Then it's up to the courts—" He paused in midsentence and stared at Krojac.

Reagan was saying, " 'Erkbat N. W. Marshak.' Who's that?"

"A big thing like a tiger that looks into your eyes, and when you say you mean what you say you mean, he just gives a little nod, and you *better* mean it, because any time you plan to get around it by some clever stunt, your hands and

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feet go numb, your ears ring, your head swims, and everything goes black."

Sheaster whistled, and a look of amazed respect crossed his face.

Reagan stared into space. "A thing like that could make quite a simplification."

Sheaster looked at Krojac. "This was your idea, or theirs?"

"Mine. It's theirs now. I sold it to them, in return for *permission to settle the territory in convenient reach of the base.*"

Sheaster said dizzily, "So that gives *them* a source of income, with which they can buy back the homesteads that they now let *us* sell, so that we, in turn, have the money to pay the loans now due?"

"That's it."

Reagan said, "That puts us over the hump."

Sheaster said in admiration. "A stroke of pure genius."

Krojac shook his head. "The locals were interested in what I had to offer, and I was interested in what they had to offer." He looked at Sheaster. "Your father had a name for that."

Sheaster nodded. "He had names for a lot of things. I still call it Genius."

Krojac was positive. "It wasn't."

"What *was* it, then?"

"Compound interest," said Krojac. ■

In Times To Come

Our next issue has another magnificent collaboration between Poul Anderson—one of science fiction's top authors—and Chesley Bonestell—one of, if not *the*, top astronomical painters.

Poul's story is entitled "Starfog." It is laid in an unique astronomical situation—a giant globular cluster where hundreds of thousands of stars are packed together so tightly they are only about half a light-year apart. Now most such globular clusters are very old—some 20 gigayears or so, as old as the galaxy itself—and therefore, are almost completely dust free and gas free. But this one has a freak history of a freak situation—and it is impossible to navigate within its close-packed star clouds! You can't see where you were, or where you are going. Navigation by the stars is old to Earth mariners—but it depends on being able to identify the stars you see. If, instead of the paltry 3600 visible to the naked eye, there were 100,000 or so, the identification of one among that mass would be difficult indeed. But the Starfog Cluster presented other difficulties.

Bonestell's magnificent painting shows a scene on the outskirts of the Starfog Cluster—a picture of a red giant as it may well look *if you are close up*—which turns out to be not at all as it looks at a distance.

THE EDITOR

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This is a fact article.
It is, in fact, the legal annual report
of a genuine corporation, Listening, Inc.,
a privately owned stock corporation,
closely held, and—sorry about that!—
with no stock for sale.

Annual Report

The research work Listening, Inc.
is actually carrying out, however,
sounds so much like some of our more
advanced science fiction that when I got
this annual report, it seemed necessary
to publish it to let the readers see
what's actually being done now!

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LISTENING
INCORPORATED

INFORMATION
COMMUNICATION
KNOWLEDGE

19 December 1966

6 Garden Street
Arlington,
Mass. 02174 USA

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Imagine sitting by the seashore and listening to the waves. If you can, now imagine that the sound of waves along the shore is talking to you. The sounds might say, "In front of you is sandy, sloping beach, but far over to the right is an outcropping of rock, and there is a quiet cove on the left." And you might also imagine that, whatever the weather, the waves speak of those same features. One time in a loud, wild voice, another time in a soft, gentle voice, but always of the same shore.

Now can you imagine wind in a forest, and the sounds tell of leaves and branches, of large and small trees, and of the brush and forest floor. The sound from the floor is a quiet sound, the trunks of the trees are columns of whispers, and the leaves are a flutter and rustle of sound. Again, no matter the weather, whether rain or wind, the sounds tell of the same forest, and the voices may change but the message is the same except as the seasons change the character of features of which the whispers comment.

These are not merely romantic imaginings; they are facts for the observing. Doesn't your kitchen sound like your kitchen, and your living room sound like your living room? Isn't the office of one character to be heard and the neighborhood bar another? Not by reason of the sounds of voices, footsteps, and movement alone, but by reason of what the rooms do to the sounds which fill them. Movie sound men have been aware of this for decades, and always tape silence on the set, for dubbing if necessary. Inescapably, each feature of our environment modifies the sound of nature in its own way, which we may hear, if we listen.

Now think of the human vocal tract as a room of mobile walls, and that the shape and substance of the room can be heard when filled with sound. And this whether by whisper, shout, or song. Or by a buzzer, a belch, or an electronic reproduction of a train. Isn't it clear that the particular sound is of lesser importance than what the structure does to the sound? We may say that sound is *transformed* by the vocal tract, and that the resultant sound carries the marks of having been there.

Consider that sound is transformed by its environment, then if it were possible to create an inverse to the environmental transformation, we would have a picture of that environment. We at Listening are learning how to do this.

We are rapidly becoming expert at information, communication, and knowledge in the recognition and synthesis of acoustical signals and environmental characteristics.

The following is a summary of Listening activities and products resulting from our specialized knowledge in the field.

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Pat Flanagan beside steel "Ear" used to Listen under water. Ear is an array designed to be used in conjunction with the human computer.

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Dolphin Communications Program

One of Listening's current activities is the establishment of verbal communications with the species Tursiops Truncatus, or Dolphin. This work is being performed under contract with the U. S. Naval Ordnance Test Station, China Lake, California. At present we have two dolphins located in a lagoon, near the University of Hawaii facility on Coconut Island off of Oahu, Hawaii. We have a language of eighteen words in use between man and dolphin at this time.

Man-Dolphin Translator

One of the products evolving out of the program is a translator to detect human speech forms and translate them into a whistle language using sounds normally used by Dolphins. The translator's mate, the DMT (Dolphin-Man-Translator) performs the reverse function, making sounds like human speech from dolphin whistle inputs.

Sondol

The *Sonic Dolphin* is an acoustical generator that produces pulses very similar to those produced by Dolphins in echo location and recognition when darkness or muddy water prevents the use of vision.

Sondol has been tested by human subjects and shows potential as an aid to the blind in sensing his environment and to the scuba diver for perception in murky waters. With practice, anyone with normal

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Steve Moshier examining spectrum of the output of the Man-to-Porpoise Translator. The frequency components of the whistle output are broken down and displayed on a sheet of facsimile paper by the Multi-Spectrum-Analyzer.

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Listening accountant
Lorraine Darnell
experimenting with an
air model of the underwater
Sondol or Sonic Dolphin.
The air pulse generator
has been used successfully to identify
objects by Listening to echoes
from the environment.

Secretary Leila Flanagan
Listening to tape recorded Citar music
through her facial nerves.
Nerve stimulating device is an
invention of her husband
Pat Flanagan
. . . called a Neurophone.

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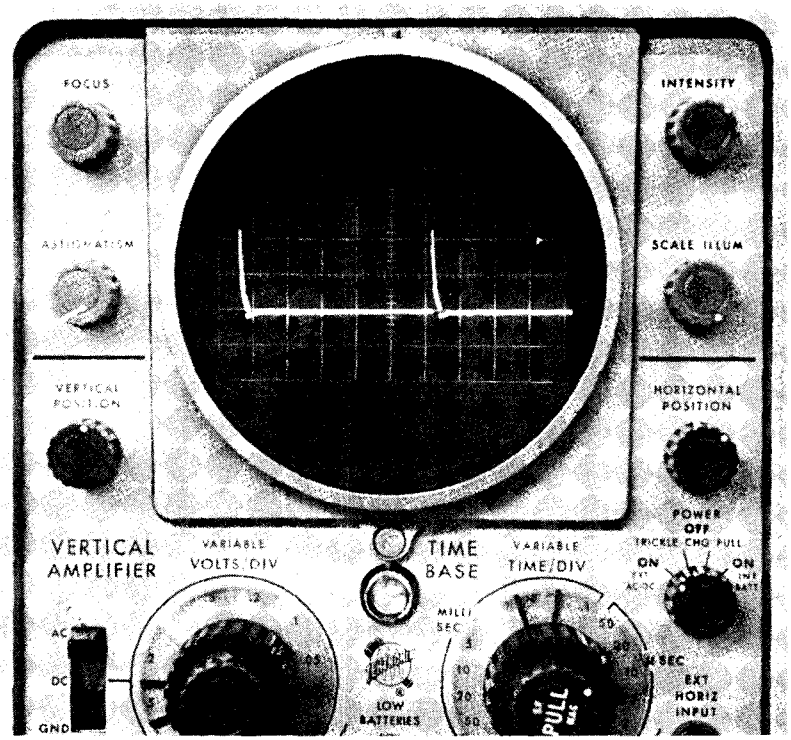

hearing can find his way around in total visual darkness.

The unique feature of the Sondol is the use of the human computer as a readout device.

A trained diver with practice should be able to identify objects accurately under water at distances up to three hundred yards.

Spatial Localization: Ears

Research by Dr. Dwight Wayne Batteau, President of Listening, has resulted in a most unusual product, the ear.

Dr. Batteau's research under Navy contracts into the phenomenon of human spatial sound localization has revealed that the pinna, or external ear, is a very delicate computer-steered array which produces transformations on incoming sound fronts. These transformations are then used to compute sound source location in space.

We have three main products as a result of this research.

A. Air-Ears: These are two microphones mounted in molds of human pinnae and spaced approximately the width of the human head to produce a binaural pickup. Tape recordings made with the "ears" retain the localization trans-

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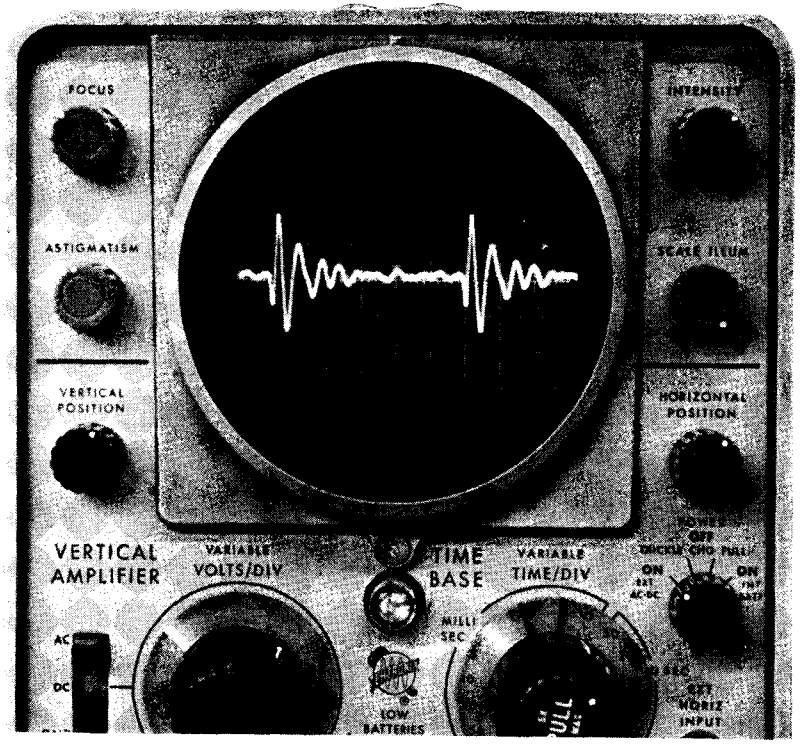

formation and position is readily identified when the result is listened to using headphones. If the eyes are shut, one is seemingly magically transported to the locale of the recording. Vertical, horizontal, and distance of sounds is preserved—not just the left or right as in recordings made with bare stereo microphones.

One of the most interesting uses for the ears is in the recording of conferences or lectures. In this application, the location of the speakers is preserved and the ability to put attention on different people is retained: for example, if two or more people are talking at one time, one can listen selectively to any one person without interference from the others.

Recordings made in this manner could be played through many times in order to "hear" everyone. The ability to pay attention selectively is called the "cocktail party effect." If the same recording were made with bare microphones, the voices would all have the same "location" and would result in confusion of speakers.

B. Underwater Ears: The underwater ears are stainless steel ears eleven inches in size designed for

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localizing and recording underwater. The exact location of sounds under water ±8° can be identified in real time by a listener. The locations can be recorded permanently on tape or disc and listened to later . . . as previously—azimuth, elevation, and range are easily identifiable.

C. Location Synthesis: As a result of ear research we can program a computer to take any sound and produce variable transformations on it to give any chosen subjective "locale." Possible uses for this computer are many, among these are exotic spatial music, not only stereo, but up and down and distance as well.

One of the problems of building a space station, be it outerspace or innerspace, is that personal orientation is lost in the use of intercoms or radio communications.

With localization computation, the various people could be given synthetic positions and thus retain proper orientation to each other. If Joe calls you over the radio, you know instantly that Joe is behind you and below you to the right at an angle of 45° and about thirty feet away. Without the system, you would have no idea where Joe is located.

Phoneme Detector

In the development of the Man-Dolphin Translator, it became necessary to recognize various speech patterns electronically. Part of this system is a Phoneme Detector which recognizes the various "marks" or features given vocal pulses by the vocal tract.

The Phoneme detector coupled with a vocal pulse detector and a fricative detector—also Listening devices—and appropriate logic could enable verbal control of machines in any area requiring speech recognition.

Square Wave Speech Generator

A rather unusual development is the DDCS which converts human speech into square waves which are completely recognizable. The device offers potential as a ninety-five percent efficient modulator to radio transmitters, hearing aids, hydrophone drivers (for speech under water), an easy form for scrambling and unscrambling, and for use in speech synthesizers and recognition equipment.

Neurophone

The Neurophone is a radio transmitter designed to produce the phenomenon of hearing electrically without mechanical vibration. The device was invented by Pat Flanagan in 1959 and was widely reported in leading magazines.

Mr. Flanagan has sold development rights to Listening, Inc.

The Neurophone is being marketed by Listening as a research instrument to qualified institutions interested in working with the phenomenon.

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Spectrum Analyzer

The MSA-1 is a real time spectrum analyzer originally designed to print out an analysis of dolphin whistles. Thirty filters are used to construct a thirty point spectrum diagram on electrically sensitive paper.

The analyzer can be tailored to fit any spectrum up to 100KHz, and can be changed by the replacement of filter cards.

Color Sonar

Color Sonar is an active sonar system developed by Dr. Batteau to give a variable color readout to aid in identification of objects under water regardless of distance.

The property of the materials of which an object is made to reflect sound of different frequencies with different efficiency is called "acoustic coloration." This is the physical property made use of in Color Sonar. In order to present significant differences in material or object coloration, the acoustical spectrum is translated into a visible color spectrum to produce a color photograph, or to present color distinguishability to an observer.

In this manner, the difference between a whale and a submarine would be easily recognizable due to different color readouts.

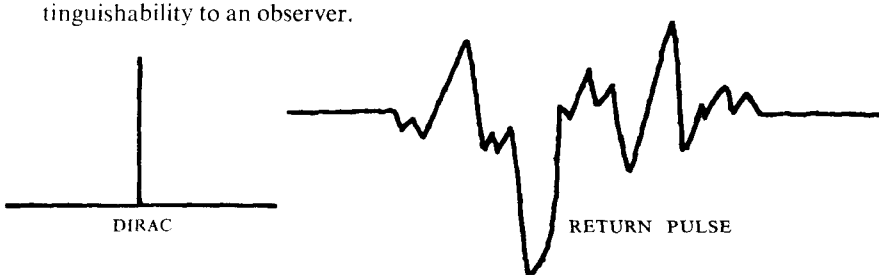
Computer Recognition of Environments

When a Dirac pulse is transmitted into a reverberant environment, the features of the environment transform or filter the pulse such that the return signal contains a "picture" of the environment. See Diagram.

Our work in computer recognition programming will soon enable us to take a "picture" with a sound pulse, create an inverse, and draw a binocular 3-D picture of that environment with the computed information.

Sound pictures taken under water would enable man to "see" and identify details of objects previously impossible to recognize by any other method but raising them to the surface.

The sound picture system coupled with Color Sonar would enable recognition of type of material at the same time.



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Aim For The Heel

JOHN T. PHILLIFENT

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

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The problem is what to do about those men who have it built into their characters that they break all codes—but never provably.

And the answer can be the use of things built into their characters!

Andrew Mellish stood in a dark room he had never been in before, and would probably never visit again. Although he couldn't see it, he knew there was a desk, and a man behind it. The man spoke quietly, precisely, with barely a trace of tension. Mellish had never heard that particular voice before and might never hear it again.

"You will be given the dossiers of three men. They are held to be directly and deliberately responsible for the failure and destruction of the Mid-Atlantic Artificial-Island Community Project, and the extensive loss of life, injury and misery entailed—"

"Then it wasn't an accident, after all? Not ignorance, or faulty design, or just plain bad luck?"

"It was not. The data has been through the computer seven times, to make absolutely sure. It was deliberate neglect, price-cutting and sabotage, involving insurance speculations, for profit, profit and profit."

"And there is no chance of legal redress?"

"None at all. Nothing can be proved to the law's satisfaction, and to instigate proceedings for inquiry would be futile. That ground has been fully covered. It's up to us. To you. The three men are to be eliminated and the results leaked. We handle the leak. You take care of the elimination. By the code. Understood."

"Understood," Mellish sighed. "By the code," and stretched out his hand to grasp and take a bundle of cardboard folders. That done, he faced about and saw a faint violet glow just ahead and to his left. He

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went towards it, and it moved, leading him out of the room, along a passage with several bends until he was once more in the light.

The man by the desk stood still a moment to let the nerve tensions unwind. No matter how often one did this kind of thing, one felt a stomach-twist at ordering the death of a fellow-human. No matter how justified; no matter that there could be no doubt; no matter even that these men were fellow-humans only by courtesy of shape and appearance, and far too cunningly versed in the tricks and stratagems of legal practice ever to be caught and brought to book; no matter that there was no other way to balance the scales—it was still an awful moment. Then he remembered Mellish, and shook his head in the dark. For the field-agent it was even worse. He had to *do* it. And do it, moreover, by the code. Then there came footsteps, and lights, and the urgent business of removing all traces of this momentary command post.

Mellish, by his outward appearance, might have brought keen delight to a student of the absolutely indistinguishable norm, but hardly to anyone else. He looked so utterly ordinary that any particularized description would have seemed an overstatement. That average, neutral, plain-gray exterior was so much part of his manner that he no longer thought consciously about it. Not now, certainly, as he selected a table with a striped umbrella, settled into a seat, hailed the waiter for an anisette, spared a moment to eye the strolling pedestrians, then settled to study the dossiers he had been given. The study needed care, because each dossier was minutely detailed, painstakingly thorough, and printed in a medium that was designed to begin boiling off the paper at the first exposure to light, the process being total after three hours, to leave no trace whatever.

He was quite unaware that he was being watched, that the powerful telephoto lens of a camera was trained on him from a balcony across the square. By means of the reflex-lenses keen gray eyes studied him, his relaxed ease, his appearance, his obvious preoccupation with his reading matter. Those lenses were so good that the girl using them almost could have read the larger print in the dossiers. But she didn't bother. She was far more intrigued by the man himself. With the eyes and trained instincts of the professional photographer, she saw what almost anyone else would have missed. To herself she murmured,

"Never have I seen one so perfectly, so completely designed to dissolve into the scenery. Either I am a fool, or that man is hiding something. Himself and something else. And very cleverly. No one—but no one—looks as invisible-ordinary as that by accident. And that," she decided, gathering her kit

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rapidly into its bag, "makes you a very odd and interesting person indeed, signor. Well worth watching a little more!"

Mellish appreciated the dossiers. Before moving up into field work he had helped to compile similar efforts. In his hands now he held a complete breakdown on three men, physical descriptions augmented with finely drawn sketches—which highlight significant aspects much more vividly than any photograph can do—last-known addresses, occupations, associates and so on down to fine details on fears and fancies, habits and hobbies, likes and dislikes and other idiosyncrasies. He absorbed efficiently, noting key points. All three men, for instance, were in this city at this time, which didn't surprise him. The code-command would have chosen such a moment, for greater convenience. Also, the three were not likely to associate, even remotely, not for a long time to come. They were smart enough to avoid even the fractional risk such a gathering might entail. But they would certainly be keenly aware of each other, and that was a factor he could use.

He shuffled and chose one to concentrate on for a beginning in depth. Vittorio Pauolo Torricelli—a name like that! Mellish shook his head wryly and read on. Aged forty-three, single, Neapolitan, financially impregnable, the backing and controlling brain behind three different firms of consultant engineers, with controlling interests in several other businesses supplying raw materials and know-how—he read on steadily and swiftly, getting the full picture. Then he sat a while, to work out his modus operandi.

Signor Torricelli stared at the card his secretary had brought in, and then at her. "This . . . Mellish?" he checked the name again. "What sort of a man is he? What does he look like?"

"Like nothing," she shrugged and made an expressive face. "Just a man. Possibly American, but who can tell, these days? I told him you were busy."

"I am." Torricelli scowled back at the card. "Let him wait ten minutes, then bring him in." He continued to study the card as she nodded and went away. The inscription was extremely simple, merely "ANDREW MELLISH. CODE FIELD-AGENT." And, as Torricelli eyed it, the print of the second line grew bright red, lingered a moment like blood, and then faded away into nothing. He shivered and felt suddenly old. He had heard rumors, and stories told with a wry grin and a snigger. It was all a gag, a joke—or was it? He felt fear, and fear made him angry. Torricelli had risen to his present pinnacle by virture of facing and dealing with anything that threatened to oppose him, not by being afraid. He thrived on opposition, but how could you op-

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pose a joke? Grimly he waited for the moments to pass, settled himself solidly in his chair, laid his arms on the leather rests, and watched Mellish walk in, nod, and sit. This man? Contempt lay thick on his face, rasped his voice.

"*You* are a field-agent of the code? You?"

"That's what *was* on my card." Mellish admitted. "You can believe it or not, just as you please."

"I believe that this is some kind of bluff. This code—is a joke!"

"That's your privilege." Mellish nodded graciously. "I can tell you about it, if you like. Somebody, some wit, made up the acronym CODE from the words Consortium for Offsetting the Defects and Exceptions of law and order. It's quite a gag, isn't it? The Code of law and order. Funny, don't you agree? Now it's just 'the code,' and everybody knows about it, but nobody takes it seriously. Well"—he waved a hand—"almost nobody."

"Why have you come here?" Torricelli barked.

"Just for a talk. To tell you, for one thing, that we know you are one of the three men responsible for the disaster that happened to the Mid-Atlantic Artificial-Island Community Project, and that you made a big profit out of it."

"The statement is libelous, without proof. Have you any? Can you even show how I am in any way connected with the failure? Can you? But I can show *you* how I lost much money, and some very good friends, in that disaster!"

"I'm sure you can." Mellish crossed his legs easily, "I'm sure the people who manage your books are first class at their jobs. Your accounts will be unimpeachable, of course. I am also sure that certain individuals who might have caused you a degree of embarrassment, had they lived, were among the hundreds who perished in the disaster. Your friends? I am also aware that many of them had relatives, and friends, who still work for you in one capacity or another, and that it would throw something of a strain on their loyalty if they so much as suspected the truth."

Torricelli stiffened. "That is dangerous talk!"

"For you, yes. Suspicion is enough, for some people."

"But not for me. This is just talk. You have no proof!"

"Of course not. If proof were available, I wouldn't be here."

"Then why are you here? To scare me, perhaps?"

"Possibly." Mellish admitted gently. "That would be part of it. But I'm here chiefly to tell you that I have arranged for you to die."

Torricelli jerked upright and his hand went out for a button. Mellish put up his finger fast. "I wouldn't, not just yet. No point in calling for help at the moment. I'm not armed in any way. There will be no violence, I assure you. I can't stand violence."

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"Why shouldn't I call the police and have you arrested? You have threatened me, here in my own office."

"I have? I don't recall that!"

Torricelli smiled a mean smile. "Suppose I say all our conversation is on record, what then?"

"I would say you're either a liar or a fool, and you're not a fool. If you care to think back, several things have been said that you wouldn't want aired, not officially. But no threats by me."

"You said you will arrange for me to die. That's a threat!"

"You didn't listen." Mellish was pained. "Not 'will arrange.' I *have* arranged it. It's all done. But I shan't kill you. Nor will anyone else. If you know anything at all about the code, you know that's not how we work. And, what's more, I'm alone. Solo. And I can't abide violence."

"You are crazy. Imbecile!" Torricelli sounded convinced. *"How* have you arranged this, eh? How?"

"I'll tell you that at the proper time. Maybe."

Torricelli's hand went for the button again, hovered over it. "You will tell me now, or *I* will do some arranging. I can have you followed, beaten-up, even killed—"

"Of course you can," Mellish agreed heartily. "But you won't. Isn't it strange that you can arrange to wipe out a whole community of people, and never even be suspected, but to kill just one man—me—would put you in jeopardy! You'd have to recruit the right man or men, hire them, pay them to do it, and go on paying them to keep quiet afterwards. And think of the investigation by the police. Several people saw me come in here, not *all* of them under your thumb. And I would take care to leave evidence incriminating you. And so-on. And even if you did put me away, which wouldn't be too hard to do, there would be someone else after me, and another to follow him, and so on. Think again."

Torricelli brought his finger away from the button again. A thin sheen of sweat grew on his face. He had never met anyone quite like this man before. The quiet, almost apologetic, assurance was devastating.

"You are going to kill me!" he squealed. "First you frighten me, then you kill me. You are *vampiro!"*

"I am unarmed," Mellish repeated patiently. "I never carry weapons. And I am not going to kill you. That would be contrary to the code. All I do is arrange things."

"How? When?"

Mellish stood, shook down his pants' legs neatly and smiled down at the freely sweating businessman behind the desk. "I'll tell you more this evening. At the lower end of the Via Conti there is a small bridge over a canal, where it flows into the river. I'll meet you there, on the bridge, at six sharp, this evening. Come alone."

"Now you must think I am

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crazy!" Torricelli shouted. "You expect me to go stupidly to my own assassination?"

"Come now!" Mellish protested. "In broad daylight in a public spot? I picked that spot and time because it is public but won't be too crowded for us to meet and talk. I repeat and guarantee that I shall be alone and unarmed. I will be expecting you."

Mellish went away leaving Signor Torricelli thoroughly disorganized and badly worried. He was confident in his own mind that the date would be kept, so thought no more about that, but gave his attention to the next chore. It was just after lunch that he sent in his card to Felix Apramin, Managing Director of Apramin International Exchange, in another part of the city entirely. Apramin was swarthy, thick in the chest, and testy of manner.

"What is this silliness about code, eh?" There was more than a trace of Levantine about his features and accent, and acid suspicion in his manner. "What do you want? Be quick, I am a busy man!"

"You certainly should be," Mellish nodded, "seeing that you haven't long to live." Apramin sat absolutely still for a moment, then laughed. It was not a pleasant noise.

"Either you are trying to frighten me, Mr. Mellish, or to sell me some insurance. But I do not frighten very easily. I do not find your code funny, either. If anything, futile."

"Perhaps. I could mention a few names, people who didn't think it was funny either. Of course, they're not available for opinions now."

"It's no good." Apramin shook his head fractionally. "I'm not impressed by tricks—or rumors. I've heard some. I see this trick with the vanishing ink. It's childish nonsense."

"Isn't it?" Mellish agreed. "But that's the way it's done. It convinced Torricelli—and I think it will convince Herr Doktor Heinrich Haberman, when I get to him. Your confederates in crime, Signor Apramin. That, at least, is not nonsense, is it?" He used a moment to study the swarthy face opposite him, saw that the point had gone home, and went on. "You are to die, all three of you. I have arranged it."

Apramin moved slowly back in his chair, conflict plain on his face, not knowing whether to accept or reject, his shrewd black eyes rock-steady. Then, all at once, he snorted in disdain.

"It's not going to work, code-man. You can't frighten me. I have long learned not to be frightened. Listen, I have asthma. I have had it long, and acutely. There is no cure."

"I know." Mellish assured him gently.

"You do? Well, I don't breathe too well. If I get excited I have an attack. I choke. People rush about and think I am going to die. But I get over it. I spoke of insurance, just

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now. This is my insurance!" He stretched out a hand to tap a small lacquered box at the end of his desk.

"I know." Mellish repeated, still gentle. There was something about his calm assurance that finally got through the other's control.

"I have learned not to get excited, or afraid. You would be a fool to try anything, here in my own office!"

"No need for alarm, sir. I shan't do anything, except perhaps to help a little." Mellish stood, moved, reached out to the box and opened it, all so smoothly and confidently that it was done before Apramin could react. "This is the stuff, isn't it?" He lifted out a small ampul and held it between finger and thumb. Apramin made a choking noise. Mellish frowned.

"It's all right. I'm not going to take it away. Adrenalin, isn't it? That's what the man said in the drugstore round the corner, where you get your supplies. I asked him." He put the fingertips of his other hand into his vest pocket and produced another ampul like the first.

"See? I wanted to help. I thought maybe your supply was running low, so I asked for a refill of your prescription. This one is exactly the same as yours. Exactly the same. See?" He slipped both into his palm and held it out for Apramin to see. "I bet you can't tell which is which. Can you?"

Apramin couldn't speak. Veins stood out like cords on his neck and forehead and his jaw was clamped as his nostrils dilated and his chest heaved in the effort to breathe. So far as he could see the ampules were identical, on the outside. But inside—? Terror swelled up to choke him further and he began to turn blue. Mellish shook his head.

"Now you're having an attack, aren't you? Where's your alarm?" He followed Apramin's agonized stare, found a button and pushed it firmly, then dropped one ampul back in the box, tapped it shut and turned to move towards the door. Within seconds the door was flung open and a female quartermaster sergeant in nurse's uniform strode in, absorbed the situation at a glance, and marched to the desk.

Mellish stood respectfully aside and watched her brisk efficiency with hypodermic and ampul, and then with Apramin's arm, taking not the slightest notice of his presence, or the victim's feeble attempts to resist her ministrations. Another ten seconds and the struggling man went limp and silent in his chair. The nurse wheeled on Mellish.

"Please leave, signor. This is a bad one. I must summon a doctor at once. Your business will have to wait until another time."

"It's all right," Mellish sighed, as she began to dial. "I'm all through here, now."

On his way out of the building he paused just long enough to discard

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the ampul in a trash basket then strolled away down the street, pausing once again to watch the ambulance go racing past on its way to the building he had just left. Some ten minutes later, at a table of another sidewalk café, he made himself busy with a manicure set and a small bottle of fluid, removing collodion from his fingertips. He had just completed the operation to his satisfaction when someone settled into a chair alongside him and he looked up to meet the steady stare of a pair of very fine gray eyes. They formed part of a lovely face, vividly young, framed in glossy black hair and so instantly attractive that he smiled at it by reflex.

"Something I can do for you?"

"Possibly." Her straight brows came down a fraction. "First you should know that I have been following and watching you all day."

"Oh!" he put the smile away and became serious, if a trifle puzzled. "That must have been dull for you. Was there some reason?"

"You are the cool one. Are you not worried?"

"Should I be?"

"I think so. See this," and she hoisted a battered leather bag to the table and opened it wide enough to let him see the camera and kit of lenses inside. He was frankly and genuinely surprised.

"A *papparazzi?* You? I thought it was only men who went in for that."

"There are places a woman can go where a man cannot."

"That's true. I hadn't thought of it like that. I suppose one should not go by appearances, and any comment by me would be impertinent, so let's just say I'm surprised."

"But not worried?" she insisted.

"No. Perhaps I ought to warn you"—her face stiffened in instant alarm and he grinned as he completed the sentence—"that no one is ever going to pay you money for pictures of me. No one at all."

"You think not?" her alarm slid into alert triumph as she dived a hand into her pocket and brought it out holding the small capsule he had thrown away. "What about this?"

"What about it?" he countered, gazing innocently at her.

"You bought this in a drugstore." she said, biting her words off close. "You then went in to have an interview with Signor Apramin. You were in there about twenty minutes. You came out. You threw this away in a disposal box. This that you bought—or one like it. And Signor Apramin is dead. And"—she showed her teeth in a momentary and meaningless smile—"the man in the drugstore told me you claimed to be getting a drug *for* Signor Apramin. Yet he is now dead. That is what about it."

"Oh no, it isn't," he objected. "That's not nearly enough. You have yet to show any real connection between those items."

"You are not surprised when I

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tell you Apramin is dead," she accused.

"No," he admitted. "I expected something like that. And, in a left-handed sort of way I suppose it was my fault. He was a sick man, and I said something to upset him, to bring on a bad attack of asthma. Too bad!"

"You admit it?" she was shrill and he frowned at her.

"Admit what? I was discussing business with him. He got upset. He died. So?"

"And this?" she nudged the capsule.

"What of it? That is the proper medicine for his injection in the event of just such an attack. I knew that. I bought it knowing that. If you care to go back and ask the attendant in the drugstore he will tell you the same. He will tell you that I checked with him first. And I showed it to Apramin, and told him what it was. I even compared it with his own, which was identical. In fact, I don't know whether that's the one I bought, or if it is Apramin's. I may have swapped them without knowing it."

She stared at him, and he saw the faint rictus of horror creep over her pretty face. Then she whispered, "You switched—his medicine for yours?"

"It's possible. I may have done so."

"What are you?" she breathed. "A monster?"

"Funny how the mind works, isn't it?" he sighed. "Yours, just like his. But let me ask *you* a question now. What prompted you to select me to follow and spy on?"

"Hah!" she put a slim hand to her bag and clicked it shut. "I take many photographs. I don't just look, like other people. I see! And I saw a man trying very hard, very skillfully, to be invisible. So I was curious, and I followed. And watched!"

Mellish laughed, then lifted a finger for the waiter. "That's very good. Congratulations. You have very good eyes, in every sense. Now, what will you have, coffee—or something stronger?"

She betrayed momentary confusion, and his broad grin didn't help any. Then she muttered, "Very well, coffee. Thank you. But you will explain, here and now!"

"Why not?" he transmitted the order and then sat back, still grinning. "This is quite a situation, isn't it? You think you have me over a barrel—and you have—but it isn't quite the shape you think it is." He scratched his jaw thoughtfully, silent while the waiter brought their order and then apparently engrossed in stirring sugar into his cup. She took care to keep her cup well away from his reach, and that made him smile again.

"Quite a situation. Unique, I believe. According to the code—and I have to take it seriously, even if no one else does—I'm supposed to

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do whatever I do in such a way that it would make no difference at all if someone was watching my every move. That's the theory. It's to preserve an ethic, and keep a clear conscience. In theory. But, as far as I know, no one has ever worked under those specific conditions. Until now."

"I don't understand," she confessed, tearing the sugar wrapper with care and dribbling the contents into her cup well out of his reach. "I don't understand at all."

"No. Not yet, you wouldn't. But let's check one thing, before I make it clear. You're not recording me, are you?"

"Recording?" her eyes opened wide, then she shook her head. "No. I only do pictures."

"I'll take your word. Pictures I don't mind, but a recording would be awkward. Not fatal, but awkward. Now—" he sat forward, all at once quietly intent and not at all neutral or ordinary. "You are intelligent enough to know that there are many men in this world who are criminals, monsters, yet who are clever enough to be safely out of reach of the law, yes? My job is to help put that right. I'm just one of many. My assignment, as of now, is to take care of three men, to see that they die. They all richly deserve it, no doubt about that and no need to go further into that side of it. But—I am a man, an ordinary man, with a conscience, and ethics. And I serve and respect the law. So it is necessary that I arrange these deaths in such a way that no crime is committed, least of all by me. Clear, so far?"

"No," she shook her head stubbornly. "You killed Apramin."

"I didn't. Listen carefully. I spoke to Apramin. I reminded him of the crime he had committed. This he already knew, so there was nothing criminal in that. I told him he was going to die, which is always true, of everybody. And I showed him the ampul of adrenalin I had bought for him, from his own drugstore—and which was, believe me, identical with the one in his own medicine cabinet. I mixed the two, but what harm did that do? They were identical. He took fright. He had an attack. His own nurse gave him an injection. But he died. Why? Because he had a suspicious mind. Because he firmly believed I had switched his medicine for something lethal, just as you believed, just now. Because he couldn't accept the truth. His own suspicion and fear killed him, not me. I merely arranged it. Think about it!"

He watched her for a while. Her face was almost as easy to read as print. A pretty face. Smart, too. He knew a momentary pang of regret at the knowledge that a lovely girl like this would never take notice of him for his own sake. But that was one of the inevitable drawbacks of his job, and he didn't dwell on it. She ended up looking slightly ill.

"You frighten me right down to

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my stomach," she whispered. "So cold blooded, so deliberate."

"That's a point of view," he admitted. "I can think of some seven hundred odd people who would like to be alive to hear you say it, and hundreds more in hospitals, and thousands more destitute and ruined, who might argue with you. All that can be laid at the doors of the three men on my list. They didn't kill anyone, either, not directly, not if you want to split hairs. By law, those men are immune. And that's a dangerous way for a man to be. My job is to crack that immunity, and to see that other like-minded people get to hear of it. But I'm not a killer. I have a code, just as you have." She cringed back fractionally as he switched to the offensive.

"You take sneak pictures. You take advantage of the well-known, the famous, the notorious. They seek privacy. You hound them, take pictures of them, sell them for money, right? But—gambling on your face—I'll bet there are some things, certain pictures, you wouldn't touch. Am I right?"

He was a good judge of faces. He watched the struggle on hers now. In the end she shrugged as only an Italian woman can, and admitted. "It is true. There are subjects I would refuse to touch!"

"All right. I won't ask you what they are, that's your business. But credit me with the same kind of ethic, please." He finished his coffee and studied her, wondering if he might be able to modify his plans somewhat in the light of this new factor. She still had reservations.

"What were you doing to your fingers, just now?"

"Removing collodion. Handy if you don't want to leave fingerprints, and I didn't. It might have been awkward if some nosy person found strange fingerprints all over Apramin's medicine chest, and traced them to me. Not fatal, as I said before, but awkward."

"But how did you know about the medicine and everything?"

"Ah!" he smiled. "That's power. That's the hidden nine-tenths of the whole thing. Information. It makes all the difference. Tell me"—he sat forward again—"your camera, it's equipped for instant pictures?"

"But of course! Most times it is essential to be quick, you understand? What are you thinking about now?"

"I'd like you to help me." Her face dissolved into incredulity but before she could speak he hurried on. "You know the bridge at the bottom end of the Via Conti? Over the canal? I'm meeting a certain man there this afternoon, at six prompt."

"One more of the three?"

"Right. I think there is going to be an accident. I'd like you to be there. Not right on the spot but somewhere handy where you can get pictures of everything that happens. Will you do that?"

"You must be crazy! You want

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that I should take pictures of you while you are actually *doing* it?"

"You keep on getting it the wrong way round, my dear. I want you to be there and take pictures to prove that I *didn't* do it. Just in case it is necessary. Unless you've had experience you won't believe just what queer things eyewitnesses will testify to. Will you?"

"Very well," she snapped. "And afterwards I shall go straight to the police and show them!"

If she expected protest she was disappointed. Mellish grinned. "That's the stuff. Perfect. Thank you very much!"

One of the difficult lessons Mellish had learned early in his career with the code was to avoid speculation about contingent details once they had been finalized. As he strolled on to the little bridge just five minutes before six, he had no idea where the girl was, or even if she was there at all. He had learned that her name was Anna-Maria Santessi, and that she was single and self-supporting. For the rest he was prepared to rely on his character-judgment, and let it go. Right now he needed to choose his spot with nice care. At this hour the light was still good. One spate of rush-hour traffic had come and gone, and in half-an-hour there would be another, the effect of public ordinances staggering the press of home-going workers, but just now the bridge was almost deserted. A strolling policeman inspected him with an impersonal stare and strolled on.

Mellish moved with purpose to a spot near the center, where city workmen had begun a much-needed repair to the ancient and corroded fancy ironwork of the guard rails. A seven-foot stretch had been cut out entirely and the gap filled with roped planks for temporary safety. He eyed this jury-rigged barricade calculatingly, then craned gingerly over to see that the canal flow right under him was building up into a torrent. All according to information and plan. He spared just one quick glance up and down the river, saw the hands of a distant clock standing up to half a minute away from six, and turned to put his back to the barrier and his face to the bridge.

Here came Torricelli now. Punctual. That was one of his habits, so the dossier had said. Mellish studied the walk, estimating it, seeing in it an uneasy blend of fear and rage, the unbalanced courage that is first-cousin to desperation. He moved a step or two clear of the plank-assembly, waiting. Torricelli slowed suspiciously, tossed sharp glances to right and left and backwards. Mellish smiled.

"There's no need for that. I'm alone."

"Then you are a fool!" Torricelli growled, coming closer. "I am *not* alone."

Mellish studied his flushed face

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and frowned: "You haven't been such a *deficiento* as to hire thugs, surely?"

"You call *me* a moron?" Torricelli swelled in rage. "For a thing like this I need no one to help. I can do it myself!"

"Do what? No violence now!" Mellish edged back uneasily. "As I told you before, I'm not armed!"

"And you called me *deficiento? Cretino confusionario!* Let me tell you, code-man, what *I* have arranged. In a moment I shall make a signal. A black limousine will roar on to the bridge, very fast. By the time it gets to here it will be done, I shall leap in, and be away!"

"Oh. I see!" Mellish edged back and Torricelli became proportionately more bold, thrusting his chin forward.

"You see, code-man, I *am* armed. You are going to die!"

"No, no!" Mellish denied, still cringing back. "Not me. You! First Apramin, who is now dead. Then you. And then Haberman. It's all arranged!"

"*Scimmione!*" Torricelli squealed, lurching forward and dragging at the buttons of his jacket. Mellish caught just a glimpse of the heavy pistol that was stuffed in the other's waistband before he spread his arms and wrapped them round Torricelli to smother the draw. This was violence, the part he hated. He clung frantically tight as Torricelli snarled. Two pedestrians at one end of the bridge stopped to stare and point. The policeman, at the other end, shouted and began to run. Past him, roaring powerfully, came a big black car. They were all just too late. Torricelli had the weight advantage. Mellish could block his draw, but he couldn't stand against the rush.

Locked in a death struggle the two men lurched against the temporary barricade and it yielded. They went over, and out, and down.

A keen-eyed observer might have seen Mellish let go and kick himself free in mid-air, to strike the rushing water in a creditable dive. What most of the horrified on-lookers *did* see was Torricelli flailing the air frantically on the way down to smack into the water with a tremendous splash. They heard him scream. They saw his head break surface two or three times before the swift flow took him out of sight down the river. Whistles blew and people ran to and fro and shouted, but it was three-quarters of an hour later that a riverboat wallowed and chugged up alongside Mellish, who was by that time weary and glad of the helping hands.

"Not far away!" he panted. "I tried to hold him up. Kept sinking. I had to let go. Heavy. Only a few minutes—"

"I saw!" nodded a brawny seaman, already kicking off his boots. "I will get him. I know this river well."

He did, too. Within another fif-

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teen minutes he had hauled Torricelli's body to the point where more hands could reach down and haul the pair of them inboard. Then, while the riverboat swung round and chugged back to a pier near the bridge, those willing hands went through the dreary exercises of artificial respiration, but by the time the police swarmed aboard and took charge, the painful truth was inescapable. A police sergeant with suspicious eyes and a black-bristle moustache conducted the interview in the little daycabin of the riverboat.

"You say you had met Signor Torricelli before, Signor Mellish?"

"That's right. Only once. This morning, to talk business. I do a little agency work." Mellish looked even less impressive than before in the thick sweater and coarse pants he had managed to borrow while his own clothes were drying.

"And he arranged to meet you on the bridge?"

"Well, no. That was my idea. Too many eyes and ears in his office. I wanted it private."

"That much is true," the sergeant conceded. "He came in a car. We have it, and the man in it has been questioned. But why would he attack you?"

"I suppose I must have said something to upset him."

"It is not enough," the sergeant was harsh. "You say Signor Torricelli tried to kill you. Why do you say that?"

"He had a gun!" Mellish said.

"So? It is true he had a gun, but why would he— Signor Mellish, you will understand, surely, that Signor Torricelli was a very important man, very rich, a *gentiluomo*. I think there is more. One of my men saw you attack . . . a moment, please!" He broke off as a uniformed man came into the cabin with a sheaf of pictures, leaned over and whispered. Mellish caught just the word *"papparazzi,"* and felt relief. He watched the two policemen argue for a minute longer, then the sergeant turned to him, putting the pictures to one side, face down.

"Signor Mellish," he said, very smoothly, "it seems there has been a tragic accident. You understand? To think that such a man as Signor Torricelli would attack, or try to kill, anyone, is obviously ridiculous. He was a great man, very rich, respectable, of great influence."

"What about the gun? Are those pictures of what happened?" Mellish asked.

"It is none of your concern. As for the gun, a man may carry a gun to defend himself, you agree? It was an accident. Nothing more will be said."

"All right, whatever you say," Mellish sighed. "I don't want to cause any trouble."

"That is very sensible. In a moment, when your clothing is dry, you may go. You are very lucky to be alive, signor, think of that!"

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Mellish thought about it as he strolled away from the pier. After he had gone a discreet distance, Miss Santessi caught up with him. He smiled crookedly at her and steered her to a nearby restaurant.

"I owe you a dinner, at least," he explained. "Your prompt action with the pictures saved me quite a bit of trouble. Thank you."

Beautiful but bewildered, she kept a discreet silence while he ordered, then, "I didn't surrender *all* the pictures. I kept some, just to convince myself. He tried to kill you!"

"Yes. It was predictable. I knew too much. And he had to do it himself, because it would have been dangerous to hire anyone for a raw job like that. It was a good plan, for him. A silenced pistol, a shot, a fast car. The pistol would have gone in the river, the driver of the car wouldn't see a thing. Yes, a good plan, only I was expecting it, you see."

"You knew that he would come, like that, and try to kill you?"

"Oh, yes. It was arranged. I knew his characteristic reactions, his temperament. I also knew about the bridge repair, the state of the tidal flow, the traffic situation. And I also knew that Torricelli couldn't swim, that he was afraid of water. Knowledge," he said, not very originally, "is power. The only power I subscribe to. You know," he became pensive as the waiter brought soup and the wine list, "that man

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called me *cretino confusionario*, a blundering idiot. That was another of his weaknesses, the inability to credit anyone else with intelligence and brains. I'm afraid that doesn't apply to the third man. I shall have to work differently with Herr Doktor Heinrich Haberman. Very differently."

She coughed over a mouthful of soup, went red in the face and then coughed again. "You *tell* me?" she shrilled. "You are arranging to . . . to remove one more, and you tell me his *name*?"

"Why not? What can you do, go to the police?"

"You think I am imbecile?" she snapped, and then, thoughtfully, "but why not? I could report it."

"My dear, the police have already told me to *va all'inferno*. They do not wish to know about me. They have dropped me, and desire me to stay that way. If you try to persuade them to pick me up again, you'll be in trouble."

"I could warn Herr Haberman, however!"

"You could. I'll tell you where to find him. He owns and occupies a massive office building on the Via Cavour. You can't miss it. The residential extension on the roof, and the penthouse above it, must make it one of the tallest buildings in the city."

"Why do you tell me this?" He was fascinated by the way fear, and anger, and suspicion, all played across her lively features, to give way in the end to bright-eyed shrewdness. "Is it that you *want* me to warn him? To tell him that he is going to die? Is it part of the arrangement?"

"It wouldn't make much difference. Might help a little."

"Help? Then I won't do it!" She bit the words off abruptly, pushed away her plate, then gasped as it occurred to her. "You *knew* I would say and think like that!"

"Oh, come!" he chuckled. "I'm not *that* smart. You do whatever you think best. But, if you'll take a tip from me, be on hand by the Haberman Building around nine to nine-thirty tomorrow. Get as close as you can, as high as you can, and you'll get some good pictures. Should be worth a bit, to you."

To Mellish, who had an eye for such things, the building combined all the worst features of several architectural styles, but he was willing to concede that those who lived and worked there found it admirable. There was certainly enough of it. He strode purposefully into the foyer carrying a bag that looked heavy, carrying it with obvious and genuine care. He used gadgetry only when absolutely necessary and then with great reluctance. The clerk at the inquiry desk heard his name, nodded and raised a finger. Mellish turned to see two hard-faced men close in on either side.

"Much obliged for the card, code-man," one of them growled.

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"We have been expecting you. We'll take you up to see the doctor personally. March!" They convoyed him to an elevator. As the doors hissed shut he made tentative moves with the bag and one of the escorting men snarled at him.

"Hold it!" He flourished the gun he had conjured from somewhere. "Do nothing with that bag, get it? Nothing. Just hold it!"

"I was only going to change hands. It's heavy!"

"*Schwachsinniger blödkopf!* I said *hold* it! And keep quiet!"

Mellish held it. He didn't mind so much being called a feeble-minded fool, but the bag *was* heavy and it was a long ride all the way up to the penthouse. At their insistence he marched out patiently into a large and ornate room with tiger-skin rugs on a tiled floor, a scatter of luxurious chairs, a tinkling fountain jetting into a goldfish pool, and one wall solid with what looked like books. Taking it in with a glance, he decided against naming its function and allowed himself to be shepherded up to a pair of massive chrome-steel doors that were, at the moment, shut. This far, at least, the dossier was accurate, although he had found it hard to believe in cold print. One of his watchdogs punched a button and spoke into a wall unit, in German.

"We have the code-man. He carries a bag with great care. It seems to be heavy."

"Do not let him put down the bag. Search him, thoroughly. Report!"

It was a thorough search, Mellish had to admit, even if they did overlook the little thing he held in his other hand. Strange, he mused, how a searcher always looks for something *hidden*. Eventually the same watchdog was able to report.

"There is nothing lethal, or unusual, on him. We did not touch the bag at all. Yes?"

"Good! The doors will open now. Remain outside, on call."

In a matter of seconds the double-doors rumbled and slid apart to the hum of motors. Mellish gazed in, into a smaller, almost austere room that was mostly silver-gray carpet, white wood paneling and a large desk over there backed up to a wall that was all window. Haberman sat on the other side of that desk, a lean man with a port-wine complexion against which his white moustache and hair stood out vividly, and from which his pale gray eyes stared as chill as ice. On either side of him stood a stone-faced bodyguard, each with weapon drawn and ready.

"Just two steps. No more!" Haberman barked.

Mellish made the two steps patiently, heard the massive doors rumble shut at his back and click into place.

"Now! You will stand still, code-man, while I tell you some things. This room is soundproof, is utterly

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private. I am master of what happens here, you understand? One word from me, one sign, and you cease to exist, you are eliminated totally. It is understood?"

"I think so. You mean, don't you, that it would be futile of me to try any tricks on you?"

"Exactly! Whatever it is that you have in the bag, you will not now be able to use it."

"The bag?" Mellish stared down at it in his hand as if he had only just that moment noticed.

"So, the bag! You will put it down beside you, there. Now! And you will stand back by the door. And we will wait, one minute!" Mellish set the bag down very carefully by his left foot, then straightened and leaned back against the doors. "We wait," Haberman explained, "Just to see. If there is anything, a click, a bang, or perhaps a pouf of gas—anything, and you die. At once!"

Mellish sighed. The bag was by his foot, it was sixteen feet away from them, at least. "There's no need for all this, you know. You're much too clever for me to try tricks on. That would be suicide, wouldn't it? And I've no intention of dying just yet. You're the one to die, not me. You, just like Torricelli, and Apramin."

"Silence!" Haberman stared at his wrist, counting with fractional jerks of his head. "Stupider *holzkopf!* You send me a warning notice, then march in here with a bag of tricks—do you think me a fool?"

"Oh, no! Quite the reverse, I assure you. As for the bag—" he made just the suspicion of a move to stoop for it and Haberman barked again.

"Stop! The one minute is over. Come here! No, leave the bag. We will deal with that later. Come!"

"All right!" Mellish shrugged and ambled towards the desk, veering to take the chair Haberman indicated, and sat. The German made a sign to one of his men. "Tie him to the chair. Make it good!"

Mellish had *not* bargained for that, and his face must have shown it. Haberman smiled icily. "I have heard much about the code, and the code-men. Never have I believed it a joke, as others do. I know of some who have been removed. I know about Apramin. And Torricelli. I know your trick. To fake some kind of accident, I think, no? Well, now you are here, tied to that chair. Helpless. Let me see you now fake an accident, code-man. And be quick, because I also have a plan. I think I will make you talk, make you tell me everything you know about the inside workings of this code. And then I think we will change a few things. It is time this infamous code was put out of the way." He rose and came round the desk to stare down at Mellish in the chair. "Your tricks first, then it is my turn. Talk!"

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"Gladly!" Mellish squirmed a little to ease the strain on his wrists. The roper had been rough, but not too expert, and he had some slack. Not a lot, but some. "My plan is a simple one," he said thoughtfully. "You're right about the bag, of course. If anyone but me tries to open it, it squirts out high-pressure jets of highly inflammable liquid, which ignite and cause a vigorous fire."

"A fire?" Haberman snorted. "Is that all? And how did you arrange it to burn me, and no one else? You are either a fool or a liar!"

"Neither, I hope." Mellish sounded cheerful. "I've told you about the fire. Warned you. So I'm absolved from any charge of direct violence. That's the first thing."

"I will have the bag removed!" Haberman wheeled and went back around his desk urgently. Mellish watched him.

"The next thing," he said, "is that your armored doors won't move now. I did something to the lock." This was true. The dossier had been explicit in detail, and his small vial of corrosive had been quite sufficient to ruin the catch mechanism beyond all hope of movement. He watched Haberman jabbing uselessly at the switch, and added. "There's just one more thing. The bag also works on its own. It's timed, from the moment I put it down, for three minutes. And that's about—now!"

As he spoke, the bag emitted a squishy pop and two shaped jets of fluid sprang out and spread completely across the wall where the door was. A second later there was a click, and with one woofing roar the whole of that end of the room was in flames. Haberman stared, put up a palm to shield his face from the heat, and jabbed frantically at his button. Mellish felt the side of his face begin to scorch and knew he had to move fast or be roasted. One of the bodyguards, momentarily paralyzed by the leaping inferno, turned to shove Haberman aside and grope for the lever that would open the window.

"Come on, Herr Doktor!" he shouted. "We have to get out of here. We have no time to lose!"

Mellish winced as the sea of flames leaned over hungrily into the strong draft from the open window. Getting purchase with his feet, he kicked himself back and over, deliberately falling as heavily as he could. He felt a joint somewhere in the chair creak at this unfair treatment. He struggled, bouncing up and down. More joints went. He rolled over frantically, to slam against the desk and further the ruin of the chair. Again, and one hand came slack. He heaved, strained, and got both hands free enough to be able to get up, coughing in the reek from the scorching carpet. Flailing bits of chair and trailing rope, he scuttled round the desk.

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There, in the open window, Haberman fought like a trapped animal against the urgent assistance of his bodyguard. They were trying to drag him out, and he didn't want to go. Mellish spared no time to observe. Grabbing a moment, he wormed past and out to the narrow grid of the fire escape. Guns and mayhem were completely forgotten in their common peril. Haberman screamed and fought. The guards cursed and tried to drag him. And Mellish scurried down the first iron flight, shivering in the breeze, to pause and scream out "Fire! Fire!"

Then he got a good yawning look at the sheer nothingness that went on and on, right down to the ground below, and his stomach lifted vertiginously. He grabbed at the iron rail and hung on, shutting his eyes and sucking in deep breaths of the chill air. After a while he was steady and could go on down. At his back he heard the guards alternately pleading and cursing, and Haberman screaming in shrill terror.

Fading in like sound effects on some huge movie set he began to hear noises, the groan and roar of a gathering crowd, hoots and screeches of the traffic, and now the purposeful wail of sirens. By the time he reached good solid ground the audience was vast, and so intent on what was happening up there that no one noticed much what he did or cared. To lose himself in that crowd was no trick at all. Getting a vantage point from which to see was a lot harder, but he managed it, and watched. He saw one figure come stepping down that first ladder, black against the white wall, moving away from that window ledge where the thick gray-black smoke boiled out. But two figures remained there, still struggling. And now there was the spear and dart of angry red flame through the smoke. Near him, Mellish heard one aghast man demanding angrily:

"What are they doing up there? Why don't they come down?"

"I'm afraid," he said, lowering his gaze and finding the speaker, "that one of them is scared of the height, afraid to move!"

"With the fire scorching his neck?"

"Even so. Fear of heights is a terrible thing."

"Then he will be burned to death, for sure!"

"Yes, I'm afraid he will."

The fire trucks growled and jockeyed for position. Ladders grew up high. Black figures began ascending to the rescue. The enraptured crowd saw one of the two struggling figures break free and come hurrying down, leaving the other to stand, only intermittently visible against the swirling smoke and darting flames. Then, all at once the whole square of window gushed into bright flame, and the crowd let out a long-drawn sigh. Mellish sighed too, and went away.

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Miss Santessi found him seated at the same table, at the same sidewalk café where she had originally challenged him. He smiled as she sat, and hailed the waiter for coffee.

"Good pictures?"

"Already sold. Very good. But once again, I kept some."

"Souvenirs? That's a bit morbid, isn't it?"

"Enough to convict you for arson, maybe even murder!"

"Come on, now," he grinned, "you know that's not true. You saw me run away. And the others. Haberman could have run just as easily. I *told* him there was going to be a fire. Don't try to bluff me, Miss Santessi, it's not worth it."

She eyed him long and hard, then hunched her shoulders. "You are right. You are too good for me. I think you are a devil. What did you do to him so that he could not escape?"

"Nothing at all. You know"—he stirred his coffee pensively—"almost everyone is afraid of something, has a neurosis or a phobia, although the reasons are buried in the subconscious, we resent them. We constantly struggle against them. I suppose it's like having a sore place. It hurts to touch, yet we keep touching it, just to make sure it's still there; the way a man who is scared of fire will defiantly play with matches. Or, like you for instance—"

"What about me?" she demanded instantly, and he smiled.

"You make a thing about snooping and probing into the privacy of other people. At a guess, I'd say there's something in your own background you'd hate to have known." She was halfway to her feet before he could soothe her. "It was just a guess, my dear. I have *not* been checking up on you. Please sit and accept my apologies. It's a bad habit of mine, aiming at the heel."

"What does that mean?" She sat uneasily.

"As I said, everyone has a fear, a neurosis, a phobia of some kind. A weak spot. An Achilles' heel. That's what I aim for. Haberman, you see, had acrophobia. Acutely. He knew it, resented it, and that was probably why he chose to live and have his office right at the top of the highest building in the city. Odd, isn't it? Freudians would call it a death-wish, I imagine."

"And you?" She was suddenly shrewd again. "What is your fear?"

"Oh, yes." he nodded seriously. "I have one, but in my case it is a qualification. It's the real reason why I'm in this job anyway. I have an acute aversion to violence of any kind. Think about it." He rose, bowed to her in farewell and went sauntering away into the crowd. It took her quite a long time to work it out and see that he was absolutely right. ■

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Rudi Palais

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Something Important

When it's well established that all you say is gibberish—
it takes a while to notice you've changed your tune!

E. G. von Wald

A complicated mechanism associated with the suspended animation unit was prodded by an electronic timer, and it commenced a muted susuration. Some time later, the man occupying the unit duly awoke, climbed out, and dressed in the clothing of a Galactic starship captain. He ate lightly, then checked records which had been made automatically during the fifty standard years that he had been phased out.

When he completed his study, he made a decision, and returned to the suspended animation tanks. There he threw a switch to awaken his Communications officer.

The latter finally joined him in the Control Room.

"No ill effects, Brrna, I trust," the captain said softly.

Brrna disclaimed any ill effects from the stay in suspended animation. Then he asked, "I assume there is trouble?"

"I am afraid so. Apparently, we encountered a severe discontinuity in subspace and were ejected. Damage occurred. Serious damage."

He indicated their approximate position on a star chart, well out from the center of the galaxy. Brrna shook his head. "If that is where we are, we can expect no help from civilization. No subspace communication can possibly bridge twenty thousand light-years."

"True. However, our objective on this expedition was to explore, to see if any of our ancient colonies survived the Devastation. Project Directive suggests that there should be at least one in this sector." The captain again tapped their location on the star chart.

"How long have we been in realspace?"

"As nearly as I can tell, we have been drifting for about forty years. I should have been awakened auto-

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matically, but that system was broken when we were ejected."

"The emergency transmitter should have gone on automatically at the same time," Brrna pointed out.

"Exactly. It did so, and there is no evidence of a reply. Furthermore, because interstellar debris has been piling up on us, the ship is already starting to break up."

There was a period of decorous silence. Finally, Brrna murmured: "When do you wish to trigger the Destruct?"

Slowly, the captain turned away from the star chart, his face expressionless. "Yes, we must decide that. Of course, now that the Devastation has safely passed, the only real reason for destroying ourselves at once is personal dignity."

"It is our custom."

"Agreed," nodded the captain. "However, before we make that decision, I would like you to check your equipment over carefully. A surviving colony may well have lost the technology of subspace. On the other hand, the absence of a reply may be due merely to a malfunction of the communications system."

Brrna bowed slightly in deference, then went quickly to the small room nearby which housed his equipment. When he returned, his face was thoughtful.

"The signal receptor functions, and there is abundant evidence of subspace activity in a region some distance away."

"Within range of your transmitter?"

"Normally, yes. Unfortunately, the transmitting system has been damaged. The coder was broken, for one thing. Assuming that the transmitter proper is working, all we have been sending out is bursts of random characters at irregular intervals for the entire period."

"Ah, that would account for the absence of a reply."

Brrna nodded. "I can replace the coder. But I can do nothing whatever about the transmitter proper. It may be functioning." He shrugged. "It may not."

"I see," murmured the captain. He pondered this information for several minutes, after which he said, "Let us make one further attempt to get help. Replace the coder. Set it up to transmit ten groups of three identical distress calls, all at regular intervals. Each group shall be one of the ten basic tongues. Repeat this for three days. If there is no reply within that time, we will join our ancestors."

Brrna approved. "If the transmitter still functions," he said, "they will certainly receive the signal. Even if they have some difficulty translating the message at first, at least they will know the signal means *something* important, and will reply."

Sanchez saw the telltale light up on the subspace signal panel, and immediately lost interest in the pi-

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cross puzzle he was working. He briefly checked his schedules, and observed that no subspace traffic was indicated at that time. This was good. He waited for the translator to do its work, gazing hopefully at the thin-lined mouth of the output.

Whenever the subspace communications receptor encountered energy pulses which its mathematical conscience deemed non-noise, it delivered the sequence to the translator. The translator had a record of all Earth languages then in use, and on this little outpost of Arcturus IV, it printed the message in English on little plastic cards.

So far, the day had been very good to Sanchez. Perhaps his luck was even better than he hoped.

There was a buzz, and out popped the message card. Eagerly, Sanchez snatched it up, glanced at it, then flipped open the drawer beside him. He compared the new one with the five others already in the drawer, and as he did so, his elation mounted. A truly excellent day. Unheard-of luck!

He looked at the clock. It was only a short time before he went off duty, and then he would be in business. Maybe, he decided, it would be a good idea to make sure his market was ready for him; and he accordingly pressed the proper code on the post intercom.

The wizened face of Transport Corporal Blanchard appeared. Blanchard was well known as a dealer with good contacts on Earth.

"What's on your mind?" Blanchard inquired.

"I got some real hot stuff for you," Sanchez replied.

Blanchard did not look impressed. "Unidentifiable Subspace Signals?" he said with disdain. "I'm loaded up to the gills with that junk, and can't handle any more."

"But this isn't the common stuff," insisted Sanchez. "This is hot. I have two complete sets of three-of-a-kind. They just came in today."

Blanchard's eyes flickered with interest. "You mean three identical cards?"

"That's right. Let me hear an offer."

"You're crazy," said Blanchard. "I've never seen a genuine three of a kind, or even a deuce. There are always too many differences."

"You're hedging," accused Sanchez. "All right. If you don't want to do business, I can always find a dealer who will."

"Now, take it easy," Blanchard quickly reassured him. "I'm in business. If they are really pretty close to being identical, the price might go to maybe twenty-five credits per set."

"Now you're beginning to talk sense."

"I'll be at the Transport Barracks all evening," said Blanchard. "But don't forget, the value depends on how close they are to being identical."

"I'll be there," said Sanchez and switched off.

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He leaned back in his chair, gazing affectionately at that last message card which had come in.

This particular card, like the other five, was a meaningless jumble of grouped letters, numbers and question marks, and clearly represented no translatable human language. They all came under the official designation of Unidentifiable Sub-space Signal Observations, and as such were subject to the uniform disposition order: Waste.

Survey Command had issued this order reluctantly. For over a generation, ever since subspace transport had brought Man from Earth to the stars, Survey had had a major puzzle on its hands. Archeological evidence had turned up almost immediately, indicating that somebody else had been there before—many thousands of years before, as a matter of fact. Who had built the ruins, and where and why they had gone was a mystery.

When to this was added the strange "messages" which the subspace communications receptors picked up at irregular intervals, an obvious connection was implied. If there were others out there, presumably they communicated; and this should be it. Unfortunately, the USSO "messages" appeared to be random groups of characters.

There had been high-level investigations, and then investigations of the investigations. And the last one had degenerated into a loud, bitter, wrangling affair between zealots who insisted that godlike creatures were trying to communicate, and indignant mathematicians who proved that if these were messages from the gods, then the gods were singularly mindless.

Finally, in self-defense, Survey cut the fight off. USSO cards, whatever they represented, clearly had no function in Survey communications. Let specialists continue to study them in their obscure laboratories, if they chose; all Survey equipment would be modified so as to reject such signals. Arcturus IV outpost did not yet have this modification, but it was due any day.

Thus ended official concern for the situation. Unofficially, it was a different matter. The publicity had been tremendous, and attempts at decoding the USSO cards had become a popular pastime on Earth. Even now, many people still collected them as a hobby.

The fact was that USSO cards had become exceedingly common. The fact was, also, that a genuine set of three identical cards was something quite new.

Sanchez happily contemplated an evening of financial increase.

Unexpectedly, four telltales lighted up at once on the board. Sanchez tossed the card he was holding into the drawer with the others. Emergency traffic, he decided.

He was right. After one look at the information that came in, he got on the intercom to his boss.

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"Sir," he said, when Commander Cardon's grizzled head appeared, "there's an emergency pile up on Bato Planet. They had a k-4 generator blow up on them, and they say they are practically out of the circuit. Also, there's a supply transport out of Centaurus that's stuck in realspace somewhere. They aren't damaged, but they're howling for a location fix."

"Bato Planet?" Cardon picked out of the rush of talk. "I think there is a whole platoon of Survey transports operating in that region." He checked some notes, nodded and said, "I'll be right over."

Two minutes later, as Sanchez was pounding out a message on his keyboard, Cardon stalked into the room. He switched the intercom to orderly. "Get Jonas and Wismer over here on the double," he ordered. "Also get me a contact with Base."

He swung back to Sanchez just as another telltale lighted up on the signal panel. When the message card appeared, he grabbed it, scowled, and tossed it aside.

Sanchez finished the message he was sending, and with a swift, surreptitious motion brushed the card into the half open drawer. There was no time to see if it were one of the good ones.

Intercom flashed back on, and the orderly said he had Base on the line. The image shown was that of a curious duty officer.

"Lieutenant," Cardon said, "we have trouble. The Bato station is going out of the communications circuit, and we can't possibly handle all the message traffic from that region by ourselves, even with our standby transmitter. We're going to have to set up an automatic relay somewhere between here and there —I don't know just where, yet. But we'll need transport, and also a full emergency crew."

"Got it, sir," the duty officer said briskly. He looked down at a schedule. "We can get the ship over to you in two hours. It may take a little longer to get a full emergency crew together."

"Do your best and . . . oh, wait a minute." Cardon turned to Sanchez. "What about that supply boat?"

"They don't know where they are," Sanchez said. "But Base ought to have their trip schedule on file. Transport number is IS-236." He waited, hands poised over the keyboard of the translator. "Shall I tell them we'll try to trace them?"

"Right, get on it."

A tech hurried into the room. "Wismer is out on a maintenance call, sir. I'm Zukov. I'll have to pinch-hit for him."

"All right, Zukov," Cardon said. "We need our standby transmitter activated and on circuit as soon as possible."

Zukov looked unhappy. "That's a twelve-hour job for one man," he said. "Can I get a little help?"

"You'll get it just as soon as I

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can get it for you," Cardon growled.

"Commander," Sanchez said excitedly, "you better look at this message that just came in. Seems there is brass on that Centaurus transport, and he wants action."

"That," said Cardon bitterly, "is all we need." He took the message card from Sanchez, glanced at it and turned to the still-waiting duty officer at Base. "You hear that?"

"You bet, sir," the lieutenant said, his brisk manner becoming a little strained. "I copied the ship designation, and we'll have a tracer working on it in three minutes."

It was very late that night before Sanchez got away, and he forgot about those good USSO cards until he got to his barracks. Since he had left them safe in his personal drawer, he decided he was too tired to go back. Blanchard would be just as happy to do business the following night.

The next morning it was nearly as bad. The automatic relay was in position, but it had to be checked out. This pulled one transmitter off the communications circuit for three hours. That threw the entire message traffic back on a single rig again, which meant that the backlog piled up and tempers got thin.

At length, about the middle of the afternoon, things calmed down. The relay was functioning normally, the backlog was worked off, and the emergency crew went back to Base.

Sanchez was alone in the Signal Room, when he finally remembered those good USSO cards. He opened the drawer. It was empty.

He examined every likely spot in the room, but there wasn't a USSO card in the place. The emergency crew had hooked in the new modification while they were there. That would account for the fact that there were no new ones coming in, but where were those six good ones that had been in his drawer? Sanchez angrily decided he might have a pretty good idea.

Since Commander Cardon was not scheduled to be in that afternoon, he called the orderly and said, "Shorty, I have to go out for a few minutes. How about watching the place for me?"

Shorty held out for two credits, and Sanchez had to pay up.

It didn't take him long to locate Jonas, who had taken over his position when he left the night before.

"Oh, yes," said Jonas with scorn. "I saw all that trash in your drawer and cleaned it out. What's the matter with you, too lazy to use the disposal chute? Suppose Commander Cardon saw that sloppy mess while I was on duty?"

Somewhat later, while a medic was putting a soothing ointment on Jonas's black eye, Sanchez was rummaging around in the Post refuse bins. "Those cards are mine," he told the maintenance corporal, who watched him skeptically. "And they are worth money."

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"I dunno," said the corporal, scratching his head. "I guess there're all kinds."

"They must be here somewhere," Sanchez insisted angrily. "Why don't you segregate this junk?"

"It all goes into the incinerator anyway," the corporal shrugged. "When did you say they were dumped into the chute?"

"Around midnight."

"Oh, well, most of that stuff has already gone on down the line." He indicated the open mesh conveyor belt that at the moment was stationary under the bin outlets. It extended to an opening in the wall. "That's the incinerator behind there."

The conveyor belt, however, had not been designed to carry small individual items. Underneath it was a littering of bits of debris. Sanchez pointed to this.

"Yeah," said the corporal bitterly, "we always have to sweep that stuff up later." He went on to voice complaints about the equipment they gave him to use, but Sanchez was already on his hands and knees gathering up the scattered USSO cards from among the other refuse. He sat on the floor while he sorted them out. Apparently, quite a few had come in before the equipment change had been made, and he found with delight that they were all of the good type. He now had five sets of three and one set of two.

Just as he was brushing them off and putting them in his tunic pocket, the intercom buzzed. The corporal answered it, spoke into it for a minute, then called out, "Your name Sanchez?"

Sanchez nodded.

"Well," said the corporal with a nasty grin, "it seems that your boss thought you were supposed to be on duty the past three hours."

Commander Cardon was behind his desk, smoking a large, black cigar and gazing sourly at Sanchez. "I see," he growled ominously, "that you promoted the office orderly to Signal Tech."

Sanchez stood stiffly at attention. His mind had been busy as he hurried back. Twenty-five credits per set for the USSO cards was one thing, and a very nice thing at that; getting broken to a junior corporal was something else again.

"Sir, it was this way," he said with great, sincere earnestness. "You know about those USSO cards that were always coming in."

"I know all about the USSO cards," said Cardon irritably. "I must have spent a thousand hours testifying about them in that last investigation. Don't remind me of it. Let's talk about your running off and leaving the Signal Room in charge of nontechnical personnel."

"But that's just it, sir," Sanchez went on quickly. "These cards were very unusual. They were almost perfect sets of three of a kind. Somebody had thrown them away before I could show them to you

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like I was going to. I thought you might want to check them out, maybe on a computer or something."

"Don't talk nonsense," snapped Cardon. "The USSO cards have been investigated for the last time. I don't care what they are. If I even suggested budgeting personnel time to study them, they would ship me out of here on a tanker. As far as Survey Command is concerned, USSO is a dirty acronym."

"Yes, sir," said Sanchez unhappily. He waited, while Cardon glared angrily at him, his big, black cigar fuming.

"Well, where are they?"

"Oh, right here, sir," said Sanchez, hastily drawing them from his tunic and handing them over.

Cardon accepted them and studied them for several minutes with every evidence of distaste. Finally he set them down and looked up.

"All right, how much?"

"I . . . I beg your pardon, sir?" stammered Sanchez.

"How much did your market contact offer you for them?"

Reluctantly, Sanchez admitted that a price had been suggested by a corporal from Transport, but that he had not accepted it.

Cardon frowned mightily. He looked at the irritating cards with frustration, then back at Sanchez. Finally, he told Sanchez to consider himself unofficially on duty twenty-four hours a day for the next week. Then he told him to get out.

After Sanchez left, Cardon spent more time studying the USSO cards. He was in a pickle, and he knew it. What he had said to Sanchez about the official displeasure which would occur, if he suggested reopening the USSO question, was absolutely true. On the other hand, he could see at a glance that these cards were quite different from the cards which had been investigated. He was furious with Sanchez for putting him on the spot like this, and furious with himself for being furious.

In the end, he took three of the cards, put them in an envelope, put the envelope in his tunic, and departed.

He encountered Ling Quezon outside the math library of Survey Analysis.

"Why, hello, Ling," he said.

Quezon blinked up at him, his eyes sunk deep in a mass of brown wrinkles. He said humorously, "Commander Cardon of Communications found wandering around in a mathematics department. This is a surprise."

"Just passing through, Ling," Cardon beamed. "How about a cup of peyote or something?"

"Fine," said Quezon. "Come along, Car. I just happen to have something brewing in my office."

Together, they went through a door marked, "Dr. L. Quezon, Assistant Chief, Analysis," and entered the little mathematician's office. Like the others on the outpost, it

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was not a large office, but this one was well-stocked with tapes of all varieties, and even a few ancient books. Quezon waved Cardon to a chair, and produced two cups. The aroma of fresh coffee filled the room when Quezon opened a cabinet labeled. "Warning! Hazardous Chemicals. Keep Out!"

"I just got this batch fresh from Bionics this morning, Car," he said as he poured. "It is equal to the best Earth-grown Brazilian, they say. But tell me, old friend, to what do I owe the honor of your presence?"

"Well, I happened to be in the neighborhood," Cardon lied amiably, "and I remembered that I can lay my hands on a copy of the latest Solar Masters tournament in Moscow. Of course, if you aren't interested in chess any more, I guess you wouldn't be much interested in the tournament."

"A complete copy?"

"That's right."

"And no commentary interrupting it, whereby some idiot explains what the players *surely* were trying to do?"

"Nothing but the record," Cardon assured him happily.

Quezon sighed. "All right, Car. You have me. What do I have to do?"

"Why, Ling," protested Cardon with mock severity, "what an attitude. The record is yours for the asking, you know that."

"I am grateful," murmured Quezon, as he refilled the cups. "But somehow I am not convinced."

"It looks as if I still can't fool you," Cardon admitted with a rueful chuckle. Then he went on more seriously. "A thing has come up in connection with that USSO card business."

Quezon raised his eyebrows. "I thought that was all finished with, once and for all."

"That's just the trouble, it is supposed to be." Cardon hesitated a moment, then asked, "Did you ever see three of a kind?"

"They do not exist," replied Quezon instantly. "During the various investigations, I saw hundreds of sets of what were claimed to be two and three of a kind. The only ones which were not outright fakes for the hobby market had too many dissimilarities to be even approximately identical."

"Take a look at these."

Cardon put the three cards on the little mathematician's desk. Quezon good-naturedly glanced at them, frowned, then set his coffee cup down. He picked the cards up and looked at them closely.

"Indeed," he said thoughtfully. "Of course, they are not identical. But close. Very close." Almost as an afterthought, he reached into his desk, brought out a hand magnifying glass, and started to give them a closer scrutiny.

"These aren't fakes," Cardon assured him. "One of my techs pulled

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them right off the machine yesterday afternoon."

Quezon nodded, satisfied. "Forgive me, old friend. I know you are an expert." He returned the glass to his desk. "What is it that you want of me?"

"At one time, there were some general semantic computer programs around. Since these things don't represent a known human language, I thought something basic might work. All unofficially, of course."

Quezon sighed regretfully. "The general semantic programs were recalled to Earth Center last year after they finished their final-final investigation. It would take me several months to work one up from scratch."

"Oh, well," said Cardon. He slid the chess tape across the desk to Quezon. "It was worth a try."

"You understand that we have rules in Analysis the same as you do in Communications," Quezon said. "Orders are orders."

Cardon nodded absently. Then Quezon smiled and stood up. He drew a large, thin tape capsule from a shelf.

"Man does not live by Service Issue alone," he said, "if I may be permitted a paraphrase some might regard as blasphemous. When the programs were recalled, I made a copy of one of them. I was the author of it myself, which allowed me to rationalize the act. I *did* pay for the tape."

Cardon grinned. "I thought I could depend on you," he said as he gratefully accepted the capsule. "I'll return it within two days."

"I am sure you will handle the tape with care and discretion," smiled Quezon. "And that you will remember that it is all very illegal."

"I'll remember," said Cardon. "If something comes of this, nobody will worry about how you come to have this. If nothing comes of it, nobody will know."

Quezon took a final, long look at the USSO cards, then handed them back. "Yes, they are very close. Quite different from the others. Who is going to handle the computer for you?"

"Sanchez can run the data through. I had an excuse to put him on unofficial extra duty, so he will be glad to cooperate. Nothing will appear on the time books."

"Fine. Let me know how this turns out, Car."

Cardon paused at the door and looked back, "Oh, and thanks for the coffee, Ling. It tastes real Brazilian, just like you said."

It was late that evening when the intercom sounded. Cardon leaned over his desk and threw the switch. Sanchez's excited face appeared.

"Commander," he said, "I ran through a batch of typical cards as a check, and drew the usual blank. But these new ones are different. They represent messages, all right —only it's all the same message."

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"Let me see a copy," said Cardon.

Obediently, the tech held up the message card. It bore a series of identification codes at the top, relating the miscellaneous data of date, time, point of reception. The "message" part was underneath.

???ANYONE?????THIS IS ????
STARSHIP ??
DISTRESS ???? ???????????
PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE

Cardon read it through, then snapped, "Is there any possibility that this is one of your own ships?"

"That was the first thing I checked, sir. No possibility. Commander, this is weird."

Cardon took a deep breath. With great reluctance, he ordered, "All right, get Wismer. Have him yank that modification out of your translator. I want more cards."

"Yes, sir," said Sanchez. He hesitated doubtfully a moment, then pointed out, "Wismer's time will be on the record, sir, unless you can think of something to gig him for."

"I hate to say it," Cardon growled, "but I'm afraid this is all going to be on the record. Including your cards and your time. You are now off the gig list, yourself."

He cut the circuit, and looked at the clock. Midnight. He debated for a few moments putting through a call to the Base commander, but dismissed it. He needed more data, and also some kind of expert opinion on this. He would file a report in the morning.

It was going to be another long, weary night, he decided, as he punched the code for Quezon's intercom. For a number of people.

His report was duly filed at dawn. Three hours later, he waited while the orderly set up Q-line scramble circuits, in obedience to orders from Base. Then the screen brightened with the image of Admiral Hodges. Hodges wasted no time on amenities.

"I have your report on the USSO business," he said with ill-concealed irritation. "Why didn't you put it on Q-line Security? This is going to cause plenty of trouble upstairs. Somebody is bound to think we are just trying to drive the hobby market up."

"Sorry, sir. A communications chief doesn't have authority to classify," Cardon reminded him. "But you don't have to worry about my men. I'm sure they won't talk."

"They'd better not," snapped the admiral. "Now I'll have to file a report on this thing, myself. And the first thing they will ask me is who authorized funds for the semantic program and the study."

Cardon cleared his throat. "We have a small group of hobbyists here, sir," he lied smoothly. "One of them is a mathematician, Dr. Quezon. He worked up the program for us in his spare time. I believe he said it involved several months of spare time."

He waited, as Hodges stared at

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him from the intercom. A slight, flickering smile began to play with the edges of Hodges's mouth. He said gruffly: "There was no unauthorized use of funds for this?"

"There was nothing on budgeted time until I inserted it in the record last night. By that time, it was clear that we had something definitely new on our hands."

"Good." The smile grew broader. "I'm glad to see you have been handling this in the proper manner, Commander." Then the smile vanished. "Now, let's get to the rest of it. The message seems to consist mostly of question marks. How do you account for that?"

"The language was non-recorded, and the sample was brief. If we can get further messages, the program can build itself a better vocabulary."

"Suppose somebody suggests that it might be a hoax?"

"Admiral, there is nothing quite as carefully controlled as subspace communications equipment. Each transmitter is licensed by Earth Center, itself, and each transmitter has special peculiarities in its transmission pattern which can be easily identified. We have a copy of all patterns licensed. You can forget about hoax. This source is not of Earth manufacture."

Hodges nodded. "And you think these new signals are from the same source as the ordinary USSO?"

"No question about it, sir."

"I see. Then that would place it well beyond our present perimeter." Hodges rubbed his face with his hand. "That's pretty far out, but we could get transport there within a reasonable time, providing we had to. I'll need special orders from Sector, though, before I can mount an expedition like that."

Cardon waited patiently, as Hodges considered the situation.

"Thirty-five or forty years of random patterns, and now suddenly something translatable. How can you explain that?"

"I can't explain it, sir," Cardon admitted.

"Very strange," said Hodges. "Well, I'll file my report. Then we'll see what Sector thinks of it."

Cardon said evenly, "They appear to be in trouble. If we can't send a ship out to them right now, it might be encouraging to let them know somebody is listening."

With a grimace, Hodges said, "I know what's in your mind, but I also know Survey Command. When something as important as this comes up, it is customary to consult with superior authority before plunging into anything. Don't forget, we have no idea what is out there. These may be hostile aliens. Just sit tight, Commander, until I hear from Sector."

Hodges's image faded, and Cardon slowly lighted up a cigar. He sat there for fifteen minutes, puffing large clouds of blue, tobacco smoke.

The intercom buzzed. He switched it on and looked at Sanchez.

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"Commander," said Sanchez excitedly, "those signals have been coming through at regular intervals of eighteen minutes."

"Yes?"

"They've stopped. At least, they missed the last four intervals."

Abruptly, Cardon smashed the cigar out in the tray. He said, "Tell Shorty to get me a Q-line to Admiral Hodges again. Priority."

Brrna returned to the Control Room. "All is in readiness," he said softly.

"You have connected the Destruct lines?"

"Yes. I was delayed in returning, because a weak spot developed in the hull adjoining the suspended animation tanks. It required some effort to repair it." He added, "The personnel in suspended animation now await joining their ancestors in perfect safety."

"Thank you." The captain walked over to the control panel, on which the Destruct switch was clearly identified. "I wonder," he said with a faint smile, "whether the people in this colony out here would think us odd. We have gone to considerable lengths to patch damage. You have just seen to it that the suspend units will continue to function for some time. Now, in a few moments, we will vaporize the entire ship."

"Customs vary," agreed Brrna. "They might consider us odd."

"It was a pity they could not hear us. I rather imagine we might have been of considerable interest to them."

"They did not answer. Judging by the amount of subspace activity, they must have a highly developed rescue system, and must be constantly monitoring subspace for distress signals. If they had received ours, they would have answered immediately."

"No doubt," said the captain philosophically.

There was a sudden, unexpected humming from the Communications Room. The two men looked at each other, startled, then Brrna hurried out. He returned a short while later with a smile on his face.

"With your permission, Captain, I will disconnect the Destruct lines."

"An answer."

"Yes. There are many gaps in the message, but they have our ship designation correct, and apparently understood our general situation. I think," he added wryly, "they may suspect that we are hostile aliens."

"The Devastation is over," said the captain. "But of course, they may not realize that." Then he, also, smiled.

"Yes, Brrna, I think it is likely that they might regard some of our customs as curious. Meeting them will be equally interesting." ■

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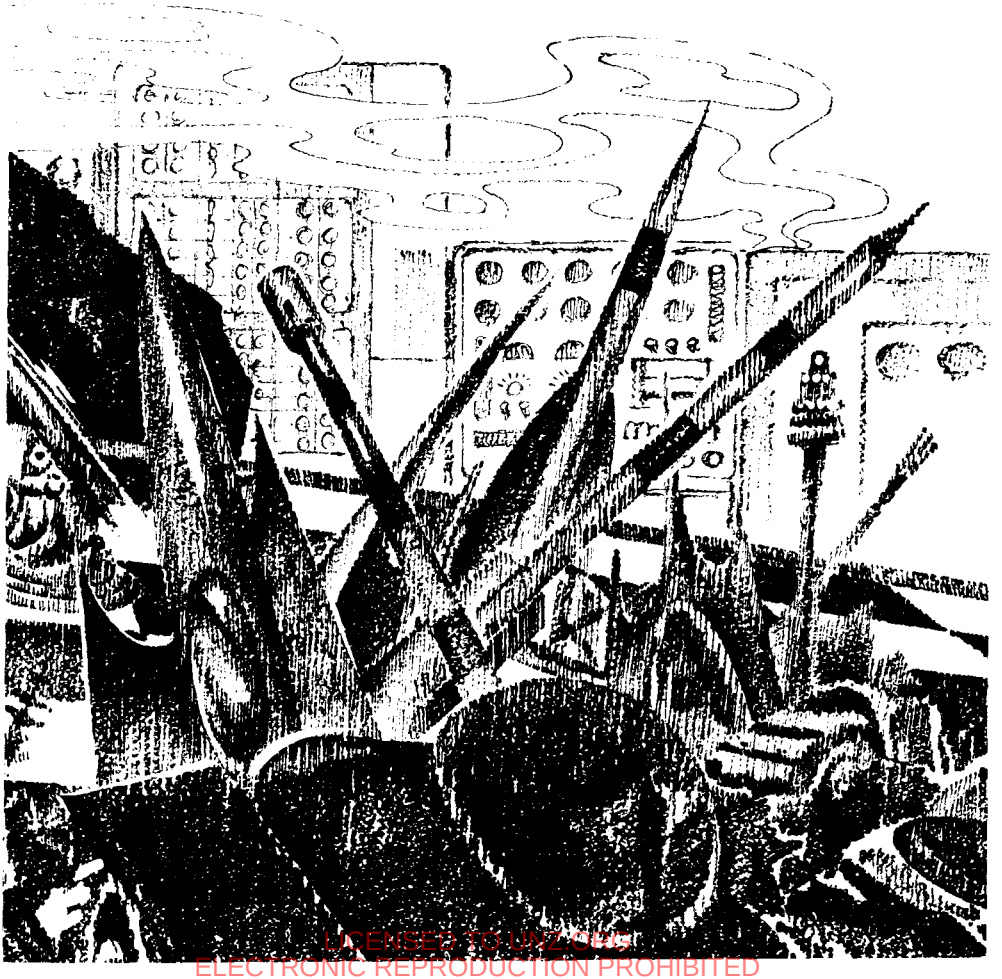
Computer War

Part II (Conclusion).
The trouble with computer predictions is that they are always and inflexibly logical. Which is fine for simple, objective-material systems. But doesn't help much in predicting what highly rational, but nonlogical human beings may be doing . . .

MACK REYNOLDS

Illustrated by Kelly Freas



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SYNOPSIS

NUMBER ONE and the Central Comitia of the Free Democratic Commonwealth of Alphaland are informed by their computer experts that they can beat Betastan into peaceful cooperation (i.e., complete submission) with a short, sharp war lasting 2.35 months, plus or minus 3.8 days. The cost in casualties would be 17,900 killed and 310,000 wounded, plus or minus 293 killed and 7,021 wounded. The cost would be 127,895,367,400 gold Alphas, plus or minus 6,730,-412.

Informed by Geopolitician WILKONSON that his plans for world domination would be guaranteed by such a conflict, and warned by Academician PHILIP McGIVERN of Socioeconomics that unless new markets and sources of raw material are obtained Alphaland faces an economic collapse, Number One is inclined to favor the war.

Sole voice of dissent is Deputy of Propaganda ROSS WESTLEY, son of an Old Hand who fought shoulder to shoulder with Number One when the dictator won power. Ross believes it would be difficult to sell an aggressive war to the people and that the neutrals might support the enemy.

The computers, however, have revealed that the war would be over before the neutrals could mobilize.

Marshal of the Armies ROPERT CROFT-GORDON, Deputy of Surety MARK FIELDER, Deputy of Finance JON MATHEISON and Temple Bishop STOCKWATER are all in favor of the war, the latter because the Betastani have been drifting away from the orthodox state-religion of the United Temple.

Following the meeting, Ross secretly goes to the book shop operated by TILLY TRICE a Betastan national who is actually an espionage agent. He tells her of the developments and urges her to marry him and get out from under. She admits that Betastan hasn't even put its few computers to work on the problem of defense.

Meanwhile, Number One has returned to the solitude of his own apartment where he meets PATER RIGGIN his life-long companion who is reputed by some to be the dictator's alter ego. They discuss the prospective war and Number One reveals that his private computer has come up with the fact that if the war is not fought he will be overthrown by his own co-aides who will, in turn, launch the attack. Number One feels there is nothing for him to do but take the step himself. Not since the Karlist attempt to seize power, years ago, has there been such a threat to his regime.

Back in her book store, Tilly Trice is visited by a newcomer from Betastan, CENTURION COMBS, who in appearance is a

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slightly built teen-ager. They disguise themselves in the current clothing of adolescents and repair to the governmental buildings of the Commissariat of Information where they gain entrance and tap communication lines that feed data banks. Both highly trained operatives, they kill a Surety guard in making their escape.

Ross Westley is informed by Number One that the war has been decided upon and to start the propaganda mills rolling, branding the Betastani the aggressors and proclaiming the invasion a Holy Crusade meant to bring the enemy back to the true religion of the United Temple.

Ross, who is actually a teacher of history by training and has inherited his deputyship from his Old Hand father, gathers his staff, including Assistant Deputy JOB BAUSERMAN. PATER IAN, and MARTHA TAYLOR and requests ideas. Among others, Martha Taylor suggests they blame a small religious group, the Amish, for precipitating the conflict, on the grounds that the Amish are secretly Karlists, money grabbers, seekers of power, and the real force behind the Betastan government.

Only later is it discovered that all the information they are acting upon about the Amish is false and fed into the data banks by Betastan agents. They lose considerable international prestige as a result.

Ross goes again to Tilly's book store, not realizing that he is being followed by two Surety agents. However, the agents are overpowered by three seeming teen-agers and are later found dead, all unbeknownst to Ross. Tilly again refuses to marry him, but warns Ross that the sneak attack Marshal Croft-Gordon plans would be a bad propaganda mistake.

At a final session of the Central Comitia before the Crusade begins, Ross repeats Tilly's point. Number One, already in basic conflict with Marshal Croft-Gordon and Surety chief Fielder, backs Ross and, instead of a sneak attack, orders that a short fused ultimatum be sent to Betastan.

Fielder reveals that his men have been following all Central Comitia members and that the two tailing Ross have been found dead. He demands that Ross be given Scop and questioned. Number One refuses, more to thwart Fielder than anything else.

When Ross, afraid Tilly will be caught, bursts into her shop to warn her, he finds her getting into a boy scoutlike outfit, and carrying a bow and quiver of arrows. She tells him she belongs to a club and dismisses his warnings.

Later, Tilly and a score of others similarly youthful in appearance and similarly dressed and equipped, fast-talk and fight themselves into the Ministry of Finance and take various measures there

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with some highly complicated electronic equipment. They fight their way out, finishing off their own wounded to prevent capture.

Later, Finance Deputy Matheison and Mark Fielder burst into Number One's apartments to inform him that Betastan agents have utilized a device that has completely scrambled all banking records in the data files. Since Alphaland's means of exchange is now based on credit cards and there is no money in the old sense of the word, there is complete chaos in the economy.

In spite of this disaster, Number One decides to pursue the war and issues the ultimatum. However, moments before his air fleet takes off, the Betastan authorities reply to the ultimatum by declaring their ten largest cities, their largest industrial complexes "open". In short, these points capitulate, whilst the Betastan forces take to the countryside.

Astonished by this development, Number One orders that token forces of Air Marines be landed at these points and that otherwise the attack begin.

Academician McGivern says, in shocked tones, "Why, the computers said the war would be over in less than three months, but at this ra'e it won't last three weeks."

"At this rate it won't last three days," Mark Fielder amended. "There's something awfully wrong here. I don't like it."

Part 2

VII

Number One, surrounded by his inmost staff, had lapsed into deep thought. Not a sound could be heard. Even the colonel who had brought the announcement of the Betastan surrender of its largest centers, although he had never been in the presence of his ultimate superior before, knew the story of the Presidor's lapses into contemplation and the fate of any who interrupted such a reverie.

But Marshal of the Armies Ropert Croft-Gordon could stand it no longer.

"We've got to act!" he barked.

Number One's eyes came away from far distances. He regarded his military chief desolately. "Very well, Co-aide, order the advance. Our armies are to counter the provocations of the Betastan border aggressions. They are to return force with force, in the defense of the Motherland and the Holy United Temple."

"The cities?" the marshal demanded. "Shall we strike them?"

"No. All air fleets and missiles are to be reassigned targets of secondary importance. The secondary targets they would have hit upon leveling these that have declared themselves open."

"But it's a trick! Our whole campaign is based upon the destruction of these primary targets."

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Number One nodded grimly. "I suspect you are correct. This then shall be our procedure. Air Marines shall land in light force in New Betatown and all the other so-called open cities and industrial areas."

"In light force?" Mark Fielder protested. "They wouldn't last the day out."

The Presidor nodded again. "That is my suspicion, Co-aide. And this is my declaration. In any city, or other locale, which has declared itself open, if a single Alphaland trooper is killed, then the city's classification is voided and our missiles will immediately retaliate."

Ross Westley said, shock in his voice, "You mean that each detachment of our own Air Marines is to be considered expendable? That if any action takes place, in any of these cities, the place would be leveled, which would automatically eliminate our occupying force there as well?"

Number One didn't bother to answer.

Temple Bishop Stockwater intoned, "Such sons of the Motherland and of the United Temple will proudly offer their lives to the Crusade."

Ross shot an indignant look at him.

The marshal said, "I'll issue immediate orders to occupy the points in question." He moved over to a visio-phone.

After a few moments, he touched a stud to amplify. Over the communication device could be heard, as though far in the distance, the sounds of artillery and bombs.

"The counterattack is launched!" the marshal proclaimed.

Number One looked at his assistants, one by one, his face expressionless. "Very well, Co-aides, the die is cast. It is now in the hands of the Holy Ultimate."

The Temple bishop bowed his head. "Amen."

Ross Westley, his face glum, wended his way through the chaos of his outer offices. The Commissariat of Information was in full swing, in full voice. Clerks ran, rather than walked, every office machine in the series of rooms seemed in full clatter. All was a monstrous confusion.

He snorted.

Ross sometimes wondered what was transpiring in this, his own department, and realized that he, the Commissariat of Information, and supposed head of it all, had only a glimmering. Under one department or the other, it either originated, or censured, every book, every article, every fictional piece, every show, legitimate, Tri-Di, or tape. Not even nightspot comedians were free of the ever-present scrutiny of his minions, and woe to he whose sly innuendo touched upon matters political or religious

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or dwelt, even in passing, upon the prerogatives of the Presidor or of the United Temple.

But Ross himself? He suspected that if he should secretly drop dead that months would go by before anyone in his million-tentacled organization would realize it. That not a computer, not a collator, not a sorter or keypunch would slow even momentarily.

He snorted.

Sometimes he suspected that the same applied to every bureaucrat on every level. He himself dealt with his immediate assistant, Job Bauserman and such department heads as Martha Taylor and Pater Ian, and seldom with anyone below that level. He hardly knew the names of anyone below that level.

But take Number One. He also dealt with his immediate co-aides, his deputies. And probably didn't know the names of any under that level. But suppose the Presidor suddenly decided to withdraw into his own apartments for a week, a month, a year, would the workings of the bureaucracy stop? Hardly.

He grunted contempt. The historian in him wondered. Would the Macedonian armies have continued on and conquered Persia had Alexander been killed at Issus? He suspected they would have. The Greek star was in the ascendancy, the Persian on the decline. Had Napoleon died in Egypt, would the exploding, idealistic people's armies of the French have conquered Europe? Why not? It was in the cards that feudalistic Austria and the German and Italian states couldn't stand against the new socioeconomic forces. Would the fate of Europe have been different had Hitler died in the streets of Munich during his first Putsch? Probably not. Germany was fated to make her bid for control of Europe, and with the British Commonwealth, the Soviet goliath and industrially overwhelming America against her, fated to lose.

Somebody had said something to him. He scowled and halted.

"I beg your pardon."

It was one of his senior secretaries, stationed immediately outside his office. What was her name? Yes, Jet Pirincin.

"Co-aide Westley. A new report has just come in. Our glorious armies are everywhere victorious. They have pressed an average of more than twenty miles across the borders of the aggressor."

"Let me see it," he muttered, halting at her desk. "The computers didn't figure on an advance quite that fast."

She held out a portable scanner.

He grunted. "Everywhere victorious?" he said sarcastically. "They haven't even come in contact with the enemy as yet."

"The funkers are in full retreat," she said. "Even their navy. It all remains submerged, afraid to come to blows with our ships."

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Ross looked at her. "See these reports get on my desk." He handed back the scanner and headed again for his office.

He tried to remember the figures on the size of the Betastan navy. As he recalled, it was on the smallish side and consisted almost entirely of lighter craft. Possibly the girl was right and the enemy ships were afraid to come to blows with their heavier Alphaland opponents.

Martha Taylor was awaiting him in his inner quarters. She sat primly, a lettercase in her lap, on the edge of the most uncomfortable chair in the room.

He took his own chair and said wearily, "Co-aide Taylor?"

She stood and put the folder before him.

"The atrocity releases," she said.

"The what?"

"The atrocities," she told him. "Four of them, so far. Mobs of uncontrolled slum elements in New Betatown roaming the streets, breaking into the houses of citizens of Alphaland and destroying their furniture, burning their possessions, beating them sometimes to death, while Betastani police look on laughing."

He blurted, "Holy Jumping Zen! How did you know? How could you get such a report?"

It was her turn to look blank. She said, "Assistant Deputy Bauserman himself wrote it up."

He shook his head, realizing that he hadn't been concentrating. This was, after all, the Department of Propaganda. He was comparatively new to the job, but he wasn't that naïve.

"What else?" he said.

She put a paper before him. "Two Temple monks crucified and their Temple burned to the ground. Three nuns hospitalized after being raped."

He closed his eyes briefly at that one.

"What else?"

"The President of Betastan has issued orders that his armies take no prisoners of war."

"That's going to be refuted quickly. They have access to the airwaves as well as we. Besides, President Alf Mortiary is internationally known more as a bumbling old, easy-going figurehead, rather than a fire-eater who orders prisoners shot."

Her dried out, sexless face expressed doubt. "Perhaps we could report him fleeing the country for sanctuary in Moravia. Then we could hang the Karlist label on him that much more strongly, since Moravia is now in the hands of the Karlists."

Ross looked up at her. "Listen, here in my own office, let's stick to reality."

"I beg your pardon, Co-aide Deputy?"

"The Karlists aren't in control of Moravia, and you know it. And you also know that old Mortiary

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isn't a Karlist. He doesn't have enough brains to be a Karlist."

Martha Taylor did a double take. "Why, Co-aide . . ."

He said, wearily, "What's the fourth release?"

"Betastani civilians, resident here in Alphaland, are blowing up bridges, destroying communication lines, cutting pneumatic pressure lines."

"Oh, now, that's *too* raw. Remember, this material goes out all over the planet. No neutral is going to swallow that."

She was wide-eyed. "But, Co-aide, that's the one that's really true."

"What!"

She held up another report. "Evidently, bands of them are all over the countryside. Deputy Fielder has ordered out over half his Surety men. Thousands of Betastan nationals have taken to our woods, the mountains, and are committing endless depredations."

"Holy Jumping Zen," Ross muttered. "Tilly."

"I beg your pardon."

"Nothing," he said. "Listen, take all this to Co-aide Bauserman and tell him I said to use his discretion."

"Yes, Co-aide Deputy."

"And don't bother me with such stuff in the future. It's strictly routine anyway, isn't it?"

"Well," she seemed upset. "I suppose so, Co-aide Deputy."

"All right, toss it into Bauserman's lap. It has a tendency to nauseate me."

When she was gone, after looking her shock at him, he realized he had gone too far. Well, the hell with it. He realized, too, he disliked the presence of Co-aide Martha Taylor, that she made him nervous.

He switched on his orderbox and said into it, "Résumé of latest dispatches. Verbal."

The orderbox said, *"The government of the arch-criminal Alf Mortiary has deserted the capital, New Betatown and his present location is unknown. Rumors are that he is fleeing the country."*

Ross grunted. That was surprisingly similar to the propaganda release Martha Taylor had just recommended.

The report continued. *"Contact between the glorious avenging armies of Alphaland and the retreating Betastan forces has yet to be made. Our armies are at some points now fifty miles into the interior. Advance elements are slowing, to allow supply columns to come up and to repair roads, bridges and communications destroyed by the retreating enemy. Alphaland air units have complete control of the skies. Enemy aircraft have as yet been uncommitted.*

"On the home front, Deputy Jon Matheison of the Commissariat of Finance, has announced that his organization is working around the

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clock reestablishing order in the medium of exchange. He has warned unpatriotic elements that taking advantage of the present credit situation can lead to legal prosecution, and, since the nation is at war, defending itself against the aggressors of Betastan, the death penalty can be suffered."

Ross Westley hissed surprise through his teeth. Jon Matheison must have his troubles indeed, to get that tough. Evidently, many a less than loyal citizen of Alphaland was taking advantage of the chaos to enrich himself. Ross was almost amused. It was going to be all but impossible to apprehend any such opportunists. Business was in a state of unbelievable confusion, he wondered at Number One's decision to get the war under way, before the financial mess had been cleaned up.

He said into the orderbox, "That will be all," and then slumped back and stared at it. He shifted in his chair, uncomfortably, unhappily. And suddenly he came to his feet. He couldn't put it off any longer. He had to try and find what had happened to her.

Ross Westley strode quickly toward the closetlike receptacle of his one-seated private pneumatic.

There was a Surety man in riot police uniform, standing in front of Tilly Trice's book shop. When Ross came up the brawny agent looked at him scowlingly.

"Move along, Co-aide," he said.

Ross Westley considered for a moment, but the urge was upon him. He brought forth his wallet and showed the other his credentials. The Surety man snapped to attention, eyes forward.

"Yes, Co-aide Deputy."

Ross said, "What're you doing here, Co-aide?"

"This is the former business and residence of a Betastani national. I have been posted to guard it against neighborhood reprisal, until a thorough search of the premises can be made."

Ross nodded. "I see. Protection against demonstrators, eh?"

"Yes, Co-aide Deputy. Only it seems that this Tilly Trice was kinda popular around the neighborhood, even if she was a Betastani cloddy. So not even the kids've thrown any rocks or anything. They don't need me here."

Ross winked at him. "Well, I'm glad I arrived before the search squad. I hope you have the key, Co-aide."

The Surety man looked his surprise. "Yes, Co-aide Deputy. Uh, why?"

Ross winked again. "This enemy shop used to sell ancient first-edition books, that sort of thing. I'm a collector. I'd like to, ah, take a look around before the place is ransacked. By the way, give me your name, I like a cooperative man. Never know when I might be able to do you a favor."

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Three minutes later, he was in the shop where a hundred times over he had been with the girl he loved. He closed the door behind him.

His eyes went over the shelves of books. In actuality, he wasn't particularly interested in the old style books of paper, however, Tilly's own interest had been genuine and it was all part of her. On her worktable, a half-assembled volume which he remembered she had been rebinding, sat, glue pot and leather scraps to one side. He wondered vaguely what the interruption had been.

Had Surety agents knocked on the front door, sending her scurrying out the rear? Had she heard radio reports and headed for some secret hideaway? He couldn't imagine her giving up the fray. Somewhere in Alphaland the diminutive Tilly Trice was still holding forth. He suspected that she was among those guerrillas causing trouble to the transport and communications systems. It might be weeks before all of them were rounded up. He felt the cold go through him. Mark Fielder's heavies weren't going to be particularly gentle with the saboteurs. She could well be hurt, if not killed, in the skirmishing that was sure to ensue.

He looked around the little shop again, knowing that whatever happened it could never be the same again. And he wondered why he had to come. To see if he could find some indication of where she might be? Hardly probable. Tilly Trice, Betastan espionage agent, was not so inept as to leave a clue for Surety men to follow up.

He walked back toward her living quarters in the rear; the tiny living room, the still smaller bedroom, an auto-chef table in a dinette, and, of course, the refresher room. All very compact. All very much a feminine bachelor's home.

He picked up an object here, one there, with which he affiliated her. A book she had evidently been reading, before she had gone on the run.

Ross looked at the title and winced. "Guerrilla Warfare," by Ho Chi Minh.

He tossed the book back on the side table and wandered vaguely back into her bedroom. There was a feeling of empty apathy in him. He stood there, eyeing her comparatively Spartan dressing table. He walked to her closet and opened the door, having in mind looking at her dresses, her suits—not exactly knowing why.

And was confronted with a slightly built, youthful faced man who held at easy-ready a very efficient looking handgun trained on Ross Westley's belly.

Had the other been a winged angel with a triple set of haloes, Ross Westley couldn't have been more taken aback. He gaped at the gunman.

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The newcomer, not moving, his gun hand not shifting aim an iota, looked at him in surly expression.

"I'm afraid we're not very well met, fella," he said.

Ross blurted, "What . . ."

"You said a mouthful, fella. Come along inside. You showed up at exactly the wrong time for your own good."

"Inside?" Ross said blankly. He looked over his shoulder. But he had closed the door between the shop and Tilly's living quarters, and even had it been open, the Surety man outside could not have seen to this point.

The occupant of the rather large closet made a motion with the gun. "In here, fella, with me. Just the two of us. Real chummy." His face went cold. "Quick!"

Ross came forward, pressing into the hanging clothing, thinking the other mad. What could the possible reason be for entering the hiding place of the stranger?

He felt the gun grind into his belly, felt the other reach past him to close the door. They were instantly in darkness.

And then he gasped as the floor began to sink. It accelerated, elevator-wise, for a brief moment, then came to a halt.

The door opened again and once more Ross gasped.

It was a large, long room, of cement, as devoid of decoration as a garage. It had a military aspect, something like a defensive bunker. There were beds in tiers, there were messhall type tables. And there were weapons of half a dozen types which Ross Westley recognized, and probably weapons that he didn't. There seemed to be a good many gadgets of the portable type around, but almost all of these, too, he failed to recognize.

From the bunks where they lay, from the chairs where they sprawled, from around the tables where they played cards or battle chess, a full score of young men looked up at the entry of Ross and his captor.

They were young men and he had the feeling that they looked even younger than they were. In fact, standing immediately beside the gunman he had found in the closet, he realized the other had undergone cosmetic surgery. He hadn't the vaguest idea why.

Somebody chuckled from a bunk, "Well, well, Combs has brought us a new playmate. Great. I was getting sick and tired of you yokes."

Yes, there was at least a full score of them, Ross decided. His mind was only beginning to realize the significance of this.

Those in bed swung their legs about and came erect, the card and battle chess games came to an end and all crowded around the newcomers.

"Where'd you get him, Centurion?" one of them said.

Another poked a finger in Ross's

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stomach. "Flabby," he said. "Alphaland bureaucrat. Why do all bureaucrats get flabby? You can tell a bureaucrat by his tummy."

Combs said, "Take it easy. I think I know who this flat is. I've seen his face on Tri-Di propaganda blasts. We've hit the big bell."

Another voice said from behind him, "All right, fellas, knock it. What've we got here?"

The voice was happily familiar. The ranks parted but Ross already knew who he was going to see.

"Till!" he said.

She looked at him, hands on slim hips, and shook her head, some of the old mockery there.

Combs said, "I was going up to check the street and ran into him prowling your rooms."

"Why, Rossie!"

He flushed irritation. "I was looking for some clue to where you had gone." He looked around at the rest of them, flanking her on both sides. "Are you all drivel-happy, hiding here? Do you realize there's a Surety agent stationed out front and that as soon as Mark Fielder's men get around to it, they'll tear this place apart looking for clues?"

She grinned at him. "I rather doubt it, Rossie. Oh, I don't mean they won't tear the shop apart, stealing what they want and vandalizing most of the rest. But they'll do a half-hearted job and finally call it quits, padlock the place and go on to the next former residence of a Betastani, hoping for more lucrative loot. Not in a dozen years, unless they suspected it was there to find, would they spot the closet-elevator arrangement.

"It's an old, old wheeze, Rossie. The safest place to hide something is right under the eyes of the searcher. The 'Purloined Letter' bit. Can you think of any place in Alphacity where the Surety boys would be less likely to look for me than right here in my own house?"

He shook his head in wonder at her gall, then he looked around at the others accusingly, "You're all spies."

The smiling one who had commented earlier on his flabby stomach, grinned, "Not exactly, old fella. We're more like guerrillas, eh? See, we're in uniform. Naughty, naughty, if old Deputy Fielder's men caught us he'd line us up before a firing squad."

"You call that a uniform?" Ross snorted. "You look like boy scouts."

"That's the way we're supposed to look, fella," another one laughed.

Ross was getting tired of this. He had found Tilly so now he wanted to make sure of her safety.

He said, "You'd all better consider yourselves under arrest and in my custody. I'll see you get honorable treatment."

The one who had originally captured him grunted surly amusement. "Fella, you've sure got it wrong." He looked at Tilly Trice, and said, deadly serious now,

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"We'll have to crisp him, he's seen too much."

Tilly shook her head. "Impossible," she said, her voice tart.

Somebody else frowned. "There's no alternative. He's seen the place. There's no way of shutting him up, otherwise. And there's no way we can keep him under wraps here, indefinitely."

Tilly still shook her head. "Even if the rest of it was O.K., you're not thinking it out. That Surety man up above saw him come in. He's going to begin wondering, and fairly soon, why he doesn't come out again. So, he's got to come out."

"But he'll put the blast on us the moment he's free."

Tilly shook her head, her mouth pursed in a rueful moue. "No, he won't. You see, I think I'm going to marry the big cloddy, when all this is over."

That silenced them, especially Combs.

Ross said urgently, "Listen, Till, come with me. The war's all but over, anyway. There isn't anything more you can do. And as things are you're running one devil of a risk. Your people are performing criminal acts, all over the countryside. Mark Fielder's going to get tough. His men are bad, Till. Call it quits now. I keep telling you, the war's over."

Combs said grimly, "To the contrary, fella. It hasn't hardly started."

Ross swirled on him. "Hasn't started! Your largest cities have capitulated. Your navy refuses to show its face. Your army is retreating so fast we can't catch up with it. Our computers, reprogrammed to handle the new factors, say the complete collapse of your government will take place within the week." He snorted. "What do your computers say?"

Combs said, "We haven't consulted them, fella."

Tilly said, "No more time. Alshuler, take him up above. One moment. Rossie, look at me."

He looked into her face, distressed.

She put her hands on his shoulders, then stood quickly on tiptoe and kissed him briefly on the mouth.

She said, "It won't be over as fast and neat as you think, but it'll be over. Don't worry about me. Nothing happens to guerrillas. They work on the principle that it's a mistake to get hurt in a war."

She pushed him toward the closet cum elevator.

When he had gone, she turned back to her score of Betastan irregulars.

Combs said, "Was that good tactics? He's a full deputy in Number One's government. We had him. We could have finished him, and then have gone up and disposed of the Surety man in some manner that would have been believable."

She looked at him perkily, "Tu,

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tu, tu, Centurion, you continually forget who makes the decisions here. That man we just let get away is going to be one of the levers which overthrows the government of the Free Democratic Commonwealth of Alphaland. That's a revolutionist in embryo that we've got to nourish."

VIII

Number One, for once showing his years, sat in almost continual audience consulting with his inmost associates, his deputies of commissariats, and closest advisers. To his side, and slightly behind, was Pater Riggin, largely silent but ever alert. It was more or less unprecedented; the Temple monk was seldom seen in company with the Presidor, certainly not during official business.

On this occasion, Marshal Croft-Gordon was reporting.

The tone of voice was barely short of accusation, as though it were the fault of the Presidor that so much of the unexpected had developed.

"Largely," he rapped, "they retreat. However, in some localities they turn and fight like madmen."

"What localities?"

"Largely, where natural conditions are such that it is most difficult for us to bring to bear our superior equipment. The Tatra Mountains, for instance, possibly the most rugged on the planet. They evidently have special mountain troops, long trained. The terrain is impossible for tanks, even the light hover models. Aircraft are all but useless, even hoppers. Bombings, although we continue to utilize them, are largely farce and more for the morale of our own troops than for the damage they inflict. Even so, amongst the peaks, cliffs, gorges, valleys, we've taken a good many aircraft losses when our fliers go in low enough to drop their bombs with any accuracy at all."

Number One scowled at him. "Can't our own men go in on foot?"

"Yes, Your Leadership . . ."

Pater Riggin looked at the military head inquiringly. He hadn't missed the way the other pronounced the title. Evidently, Number One, in his agitation, had failed to notice.

". . . However, mountains in Alphaland are comparatively gentle and our mountaineers few. The Betastani get about on skis and on devices called snowshoes. They have little motorized equipment, but this is especially adapted to snow and mountains. It is as though their commanding officers always expected to fight a defensive action in this terrain. Their men are armed largely with rifles with telescopic sights. Individuals, or small squads, sit in caves, or on mountain tops, and pick off our men at great distances, one by one. By the time we've secured one area, they manage to infiltrate around it and at-

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tack our supply and communications lines from the rear. It is all we can do to program our portable military computers quickly enough to handle each new situation that develops."

Number One thought about it for a time. "Where else do they hold out?"

"In the swampy areas of their southernmost provinces. It's not quite as bad as the mountains. Some of our equipment is usable, especially along the roads. However . . ." he hesitated. The anger had been growing in his voice as he reported.

"However, what?"

"They blow the bridges, tear down communication lines, destroy surprisingly long stretches of roads going through the worst of the swamp areas." He said, with considerable disgust, "You'd think they didn't give a damn what their countryside will look like when the war is over."

"Scorched earth policy," Pater Riggin muttered.

Number One turned on him. "What?"

The Temple monk shrugged and patted his rounded tummy. "Back in the early days on Earth, it was occasionally utilized. The Russians, when invaded by Napoleon in command of the most powerful army the world had ever seen, simply continued to fade back before him as he advanced. They destroyed everything in his path, cities, towns, granaries, crops, orchards, all livestock they couldn't drive away. They destroyed, totally, their own country which he was due to overrun. By the time he reached Moscow, supposedly the goal which would mean his victory, his troops were already on short rations. It was before the day of canned food, and his general staff had planned largely to live off the countryside. It is estimated that not one man out of twenty, of the Grand Army, got back to Europe proper."

Number One felt a twinge go through him. He turned back to Marshal Croft-Gordon. "Go on, Coaide. What else?"

"Largely, we progress elsewhere, with the funkers fleeing before us, unwilling to stand and fight."

"Surely you must be able to corner, or surround, some elements."

"Of course! You think my armies are composed of cloddies?" The marshal's tone was unnaturally belligerent before his superior. "But when we do, large numbers simply melt away. They dissolve into smaller units and take to the woods, hills, swamps, wherever motorized military units find it most difficult to operate. They become guerrillas, never standing and fighting, but sniping, burning, assassinating. It's the most idiotic, infuriating type warfare imaginable. Why, there are no back areas. The territory we overrun is never secure. Soldiers on leave, expecting to have a cold glass of guzzle in some local inn,

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never know when a grenade will be tossed through the window. Soldiers strolling the streets in a conquered village never know when a sniper will pick one off."

Number One fell into thought.

Not even Marshal Croft-Gordon felt rebellious enough to interrupt.

Finally the Presidor shook himself and said, "Would it be of benefit to ignore public opinion and resort to nuclear weapons?"

Both the marshal and Pater Riggin stared at him in shock.

"Jim," the Temple monk said, so low as hardly to be heard.

The marshal shook his head, in bitter regret. "There are no particular targets we could use. We can't flatten the Tatra Mountains, they cover an area larger than most of the neutral nations can boast. And besides, how can we know what action United Planets might ultimately take? Fusion and even fission weapons have been used only two or three times in the past century amongst the some three thousand member planets of UP, and in each case, it meant disaster for the user."

Number One changed the subject abruptly. "How much of their countryside do we now nominally control?"

"Nominally, is correct. But including the open cities that capitulated, more than one half. However, there is another element here. I need more troops. More age groups must be called up to the colors. My men are being spread too thin, considering the number of guerrillas operating behind our lines."

His ultimate leader nodded wearily. "We'll consider it. The finances involved are a problem; Coaide Matheison is still working in a madhouse. So are the anti-draft and peace riots a problem. But I'll take it up."

Marshal Croft-Gordon barked, "It's not just a matter of taking it up, Your Leadership. I *must* have more men, more equipment, more munitions. Do you realize that the computers estimate that it is taking an average of fourteen tons of ammunition, bombs or other expendable material, to kill one Betastani, the way they are now fighting?"

Number One looked at him bleakly. "Pay attention to the manner in which you address me, Coaide. I weary of your lack of courtesy."

A young woman pushing a baby carriage passed two Surety guards who idled at a street corner.

One of them grinned down into the conveyance, but she whispered, "shhhhh, asleep."

"I gotta little girl," he whispered back.

She went on her way, turning a corner. The street was clear before her.

She darted her eyes, up, down, then temporarily abandoned the

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carriage at an alley head and scurried up the narrow way half a dozen feet. A pair of rubber handled wire snips materialized in her hand.

Moving fast, she approached an innocuous looking box set into the brick of the building.

Her little tool went snik, snik, snik.

Deputy Mark Fielder of the Commissariat of Surety was on the carpet. His face, for once incapable of controlling inner currents, was slowly darkening.

Number One rumbled, "You were aware of the state of the man in the street. Co-aide Westley warned us repeatedly at sessions of the Central Comitia. And now, here, this massacre. Your men firing at teenage children."

"Your Leadership! Hardly children. The affair began as a demonstration against the new draft edicts. Children are not of draft age."

Pater Riggin raised his eyebrows and murmured, "I had always thought otherwise. What is a boy of seventeen?"

They both ignored him.

"Go on." Number One said ominously. "Explain, Co-aide, why over a hundred and fifty of my people were shot down on the streets of Alphacity."

There were blisters of cold sweat on the forehead of the Surety chief.

"It began fairly innocuously. My men, armed only with truncheons, attempted to break up their march. However, new elements, attracted undoubtedly as usual from curious passers-by, encouraged the youths. Some had the audacity to call out against my Surety men. The crowd swelled. My commandant in charge called for reserves."

Fielder took a handkerchief from a pocket and wiped his face.

"Nobody seems to know how the first spark was struck. Most likely, it was one of the Betastani . . ."

"The what . . . !"

"The saboteurs. Was Your Leadership of the opinion that these continuing civil disturbances were spontaneous on the part of our own citizens? Please, Co-aide Presidor, this much activity does not come spontaneously. It is planned. Any police agency, down through the ages, could tell you that. Riots need leaders. Most often, they need planning. Our people are too well disciplined to provide either."

Number One was dour. "Tell me more about these saboteurs before continuing with today's riot."

Deputy Fielder felt himself on stronger ground. "How long the Betastani funkers have been planning for this war is unknown, but I begin to suspect that it had been even longer than our own preparations and certainly on a different level. We should have suspected the large number of exchange students that enrolled in our universities. We should . . ."

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Pater Riggin murmured mildly, "At the time we thought it a wonderful opportunity to influence their minds toward our form of regime and our religion." Once again they ignored him. He didn't mind.

". . . Have paid more attention to the number of their citizens who took up semipermanent residence in Alphacity and elsewhere. At any rate, upon the declaration of war, these supposed students, tourists and temporary residents, disappeared into our streets, our mountains, our countryside. My commissariat is now of the opinion that a considerable number are highly trained ECE agents, or graduates of their hush-hush Partisan Tech."

"What was that last?"

"A very secretive, very difficult, high demanding institution devoted to guerrilla warfare as adapted to the modern scene. Marshal Croft-Gordon has infiltrated several of his best ECE men, though all but one were eventually exposed and imprisoned. Without doubt, whoever scrambled Deputy Matheison's records was a product of Partisan Tech."

"At any rate, Your Leadership, evidently the Betastan espionage and guerrilla chiefs hit upon the idea of disguising large numbers of their operatives as teen-agers. Has it ever occurred to you how inconspicuous a teen-ager is upon the streets? Their very loudness of dress, their raucous voices, their adolescent gawkiness, tend to make us ignore them, usually scornfully.

"Very well, my computers, working on what little data we can program them with, have established that there are some four thousand Betastani operatives, plus or minus three hundred and twelve, disguised as teen-agers in Alphaland, at least half of them in Alphacity. Their equipment has evidently been accumulated, in various drops, over the years, some imported, some stolen."

Number One had been staring at him grimly. He rumbled now, "And why was all this not brought to my attention sooner?"

His Surety head was suavely defensive. "Your Leadership, not even the Presidor can carry all the details of government. It was deemed basically a problem of my commissariat."

"You certainly did little to solve it, Co-aide! You flat, can't you see that such situations should have been cleaned up before the Crusade began?"

"We didn't know its magnitude until the war started, Your Leadership."

His superior looked at him ominously. "You do not seem to hold down your position as well as I once thought, Co-aide Fielder. It was your job to know of these spies and saboteurs." He glowered at the other for a moment. "Go on with today's riots and the ineptness of the manner in which they were handled."

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"Yes, Co-aide Presidor. The spark was struck, as I say probably by a Betastani agent. My men used their riot batons. The students began to throw bricks, torn from a nearby construction job. Several Surety agents were badly wounded. Reinforcements came up, armed with stun guns. Several of these were surrounded and captured by the growing mobs. The mobs were now not young draftees alone, but older adults as well. They were shouting for the ending of the war and the resignation of your government."

"Oh, they *were!*"

"The captured stun guns were turned against my men, who, by this time were being reinforced by armored cars and squads armed with scramblers."

Pater Riggin said in gentle accusation, "You turned scramblers loose on an unarmed mob of our own people?"

Fielder looked at him desperately. "*Unarmed*, is one way of putting it. There were thousands of them by then. They were armed with everything they could improvise. Hadn't we suppressed it all with every means we had on hand, they would have marched on the government buildings."

He wound up, saying, "As it was, it was necessary for me to call upon Marshal Croft-Gordon to send three regiments of Air Marines to help police the area."

Number One was ominous again. "This is the first I have heard of that step, Co-aide. I am not sure that I like the idea of Marshal Croft-Gordon's men under arms in my capital city."

A benign looking civilian, seemingly in his late middle years, issued forth from a personal pneumatic car at one of the entry points facing Independence Square in downtown Alphacity. He looked up and down the moderately crowded street, before turning to dismiss the vehicle.

As though casually, he dropped a small packet into the seat of the car he had just left and threw the control to dismiss it.

Even as he straightened, two inconspicuously garbed men grasped him by either arm.

"All right, fella," one snarled. "What was that you left in the pneumatic, a grenade?"

"I . . . I beg your pardon?"

One of them flashed a Surety badge. "Come along with us, Pop. You've had it. You got any proof you're an Alphaland citizen and loyal to His Leadership, the Presidor?"

"Help! Help!" their prisoner screamed suddenly, attempting to wrench away.

Five or six youngsters, dressed in the current foofaraw affected by juvenile delinquents and adolescents in general, came jostling forward.

They surrounded the two Surety

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men and their captive, yelling, pushing close, complaining vociferously.

"Let him go, you two crooks!"

"Hey, stop hitting my father, you big funker!"

"They're robbin' this old man! Pickpockets!"

"Let him go, you yokes!"

A crowd began to gather, jostling, shoving, trying to see. It was a busy corner, the crowd grew, geometrically.

Unseen, one of the youths slid his hand under his jacket to emerge with a short bladed, ice-pick-like weapon. He jabbed it, underhanded, into the spine of the heavy-set Surety agent before him. The man groaned softly and collapsed.

Far beneath them, in the city's pneumatic transport system, the innocent packet blew lustily, wrecking a central shuttle area.

For once the dignity of age had escaped from Academician Philip McGivern. His face was a confusion of conflicting expressions, his hands were trembling.

Number One considered the aged economist dourly. The elderly, he decided, forgetting his own years, collapsed quickly under unwonted pressures.

He made no attempt to encourage the Old Hand companion of the days of his revolutionary seizure of power.

"Your report," he said curtly.

"Jim," the other blurted, "the whole economy's tottering. It was bad enough, the mess made of the financial system. Jon Matheison's been doing yeoman's work, toiling arduously day and night, to make some sort of order out of the chaos."

"But . . ." Number One led him on.

"But, Jim . . ."

"We're in formal audience, Coaide. Don't call me by personal name."

"Uh . . . yes, Your Leadership. We've found out what happened to the Betastani fleet."

This was not news to the Presidor, but he held his peace for the moment. Undoubtedly, there were new angles.

"Your Leadership, they didn't exactly go into hiding. They submerged and dispersed, the whole navy. They've become commerce raiders. If there's any manner in which they can keep from standing and fighting, they do."

"Funkers," his superior rumbled angrily.

"No, no, it's not that." The old man was shaking his head miserably. "Jim, it's obviously long planned. I've been looking into this submarine raider business, checking way back through history. There were two major wars back on early Earth where such means of warfare almost won a conflict that otherwise couldn't have possibly succeeded. It is estimated that had Hitler been able to have kept

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only fifty submarines operative throughout his war, he would have brought his opponents to their knees."

"What's this got to do with here and now?"

The palsied socioeconomist took it up. "The Betastani ships are all submersible, of course. They have given up acting as a fleet and all of their craft have taken up raiding our commerce. Your Leadership, our glorious navy can't begin to defend our more than five thousand merchantmen. The Betastani act as though each of their units is expendable. They dash in to the attack no matter what the odds and would rather sink a merchant ship than a battle cruiser. Even convoys, heavily guarded, are no defense. In fact, several of our co-aide admirals contend that they're a mistake; they just bunch up our ships and make them more vulnerable and easier to find."

"Sum up the situation, Co-aide! What does it mean in terms of the war effort?"

"Ordinarily, Your Leadership, Alphaland is all but self-sufficient. But not in time of war. The expenditure of raw materials in our munitions factories is enormous. We need copper, chrome, lead, zinc. Eventually we will need . . ."

Number One held up a hand. "All right. The situation isn't expected to last long enough for this to be an issue. The conflict will be over before it becomes disastrous. Almost all Betastan has been overrun, their armies have collapsed, or are dissolving. As soon as we can locate and arrest their underground government, we can force them to sign a peace. Our recovery will be immediate. We'll seize their treasury to buttress our own. And the neutral nations, seeing our strength of position, will rally to our support."

Pater Riggin said mildly, "The neutral nations, Jim? I understand that Gambania, Morrisland and New Zambia severed relations with us this morning, and that their mobilization is almost complete."

McGivern was saying in agony, in refutation of his leader's words, "Originally, the computers said the war would last less than two months and a half. Later they said less than a month. But now the war's going into its fifth month, and we're in a worse situation then when it began. We can't keep this up, Jim, we can't keep it up!"

"Don't call me Jim, you funker!" Number One roared.

The Old Hand stared at him, shocked.

The skipper of the M/S Freedomland *came up behind his third officer and two deckmen who were leaning over the starboard rail and rapped, "What in the name of the Holy damned Ultimate are you doing?"*

They turned, grinning.

"Look, those kids down there."

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The captain looked over the side. Below, four or five kids on a makeshift raft, two others working out of a battered rowboat—all attired in raggedy bathing trunks—were yelling and shouting up to them.

"What'n the hell do they want?" the captain growled. "We're almost loaded. You men get to your posts."

The third said, "They're diving for centavos, Skipper. The local coinage. Here, watch." He tossed two or three coins into the water.

Immediately, it was a matter of bottoms up, and the kids had hopped and dove into the darkish waters.

"They gettum, every one," one of the crewmen laughed. "You'd think that water was too dirty."

"I'll be damned," the skipper said. "Like nardy dolphins, aren't they?" He stuck his hand into a trouser pocket to check his change.

Down below, one of the dolphins *had pulled up against the ship's hull. A small plastic packet was in his hands. He placed it carefully about ten feet abaft the bow and about two feet above the keel. It stuck, magnetically. If information was correct, and it was, the fuel tanks of the* M/S Freedomland *commenced at this point.*

The swimmer, his lungs beginning to ache, threw a small stud on the side of the plastic container, and headed back for the surface, a coin in his hand which he had extracted from his belt, rather than finding on the harbor bottom.

Behind him, the little packet was going, tic-toc, tic-toc.

IX

Temple Bishop Stockwater, trailed by two Temple vicars, proceeded benignly along the corridors of the Commissariat of Information.

Passers-by widened their eyes, came to a quick halt and touched fingers to lips in religious salute. He nodded and murmured blessings as he progressed.

In the central office of the deputy, he made his way, in the slow shuffle of the religious, to the desk of Senior Secretary Jet Pirincin, who was all but popeyed at his presence. She began to come quickly erect, her fingers immediately to lips.

But he held out a soft, white hand in placation.

"Easy, Daughter," he murmured. "I shall not interrupt your blessed efforts, participating in the holy Crusade. Now, that is the co-aide deputy's office, I assume?"

"Yes . . . yes . . . Your Blessedness. I . . . I . . ."

"Don't bother yourself, Daughter." He blessed her and moved on.

Upon the entry into his inner sanctum of the United Temple's representative to the Central Comitia, Ross Westley hurried to his feet. The visit was unprecedented. Although Temple Bishop Stockwater and he met often, in the pres-

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ence of Number One, he had never before held private conversation with the other.

The Temple bishop smiled unctuously at him, murmured something that ended in, ". . . My son," and then turned to his Temple vicars.

It occurred to Ross Westley that the two younger men were on the tall and brawny side and not overly saintly in countenance.

The Temple bishop bade the two remain outside and waited until the door was closed behind them. He then turned to his host.

Ross Westley indicated his most comfortable chair. "Your Blessedness, this is a great honor. Could I offer you refreshment?"

The other lowered his bulk and gave an unbishoplike squirm to achieve complete ease. He beamed at Ross. "I have heard that the Presidor imports a beverage from Mother Earth that is quite unique. Ah, sherry, I believe it is called. You wouldn't have a small amount I might sample?"

Ross was slightly taken aback. "Sherry? I believe I've read about it. But, I understand it's alcoholic, Your Blessedness."

The Temple bishop looked at him. Finally he said, "Indeed. Then, of course, the Presidor would never touch lip to such an abomination."

Ross shrugged that part of it off. He indicated his orderbox. "I could have Co-aide Pirincin bring you a sherbet."

"Never mind," the Temple bishop said, his voice slightly less benign. "I shall, Co-aide Deputy Westley, come immediately to the point."

However, he didn't. For a time, he skirted it.

He said, eyeing the other pensively, "You have, I understand, some learning in history, Co-aide Westley."

Ross, wondering still at the other's presence, said, "I had expected to become a teacher of the subject, before my father's assassination brought me to this position."

Temple Bishop Stockwater put the tips of his fingers together and beamed. "Of course. Then the following facts will not be strange to you. My son, I bid you recall the history of Western religion in the Mother Earth nation of Mexico. Most briefly, representatives of the prevailing European religion landed with the Conquistadores under Cortes. They backed with their every effort the Spanish cause and were instrumental in completely destroying the religious and other institutions of the aborigines."

Ross, frowning, nodded. "Of course."

The Temple bishop went on. "For several centuries, during the Spanish domination, this religious organization supported the Spanish in their disastrous rule of the predominantly Amerind population. When there was rebellion, they strongly sided with authority. At long last, when Europe was em-

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broiled in the Napoleonic Wars. Latin America revolted, including Mexico. The church lined up, as usual, with the ruling power."

Ross, still frowning, still nodded.

"However, the people won and Spain was ousted. The new government continued its attempts at reform of the institutions that had been established under the Spanish rule. However, the more conservative groups, largely remnants of the older regime, fought back to the extent possible and finally invited in the so-called Emperor Maximilian, an Austrian Hapsburg, who was backed militarily by Napoleon the Third of France. The religious body supported the France-Maximilian alliance and repudiated the democratic government headed by Juarez.

"But . . . shall we say, unfortunately? . . . it was Juarez who prevailed and Maximilian was shot. Juarez, however, did not long survive him and soon the government came under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, the representative of the great landholders and most conservative elements. When the people again rose in revolt against the dictatorship, under Madero, the religious organization supported the authorities. However, though Madero was killed his followers eventually won and came to power."

The bishop at last was silent and looked at Ross Westley thoughtfully. "My son, are you beginning to see my point?"

Ross shrugged. "The historian, Gibbon, pointed out in his 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' that established religions always support the established authority."

The United Temple representative nodded, as though the other had made some profound statement. "As it should be," he said. "However, let me finish with the example of Mexico. Four times in succession this religious group has backed the, ah, established authority, or, at least, the minority conservative elements in society. The people, at long last, had grown tired of this. So strong measures were taken against our colleagues of yesteryear. Under the conservative regimes they had grown wealthy indeed, controlling a great deal of the property of the country. But the new government now confiscated this property. They passed laws against alliances between the State and Church. They prevented religious orders from teaching in the schools. They went so far as to forbid priests and nuns from appearing in the streets in religious garb. They passed laws preventing them from soliciting alms in public. They even passed a law preventing church bells from ringing more than one minute in duration, at a time." The bishop registered indignation. "It was a horrible persecution."

Ross said, "Your Blessedness, I am afraid I am dense. I don't see what you're driving at."

Temple Bishop Stockwater nod-

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ded. "My son, the United Temple must take a lesson from this example and other similar ones. Although it has a duty to established authority, it has a greater duty still to itself and its mission to bring all to the eventual glory of the Holy Ultimate. No longer can a religious organization in all consciousness stand on the sidelines when an unpopular authority is running athwart the desires of the people."

Ross Westley couldn't believe he was translating this double-talk correctly. He stared at the other.

The Temple bishop looked into his eyes. "My son, there are others who are of similar belief. I pray you are with us."

"With you! What are you suggesting?"

The other smiled benignly. "There will be a meeting of our farseeing, idealistic group almost immediately, my son. Will you come with me?"

Ross Westley was still staring. He was trying desperately to assimilate this. If it meant what he thought it meant . . . He came suddenly to his feet.

"Let's go," he said.

At the door, he stood aside to let the older man precede him. The two goonlike Temple vicars fell in behind. For a brief moment a suspicion hit him. What would have happened had he refused to accompany the United Temple representative?

The group passed Jet Pirincin who followed them with her eyes, a surprise in their depths, until they had passed completely from the offices.

She thought about it for a moment, reached down slowly and picked up a handphone, unequipped with screen. She said into it, "Relay this to T."

Outside the Commissariat of Information building was the elaborate, almost flamboyant, hoverlimousine of a Temple bishop, the insignia of the United Temple prominent on its side. Behind was parked a small vehicle, more decorous but with the emblem on both doors and rear. For the Temple vicars cum guards, Ross told himself.

He was accorded the honor of riding with the Temple bishop, wondering, as they drove, at the destination.

He might have known. Temple Bishop Stockwater dialed the coordinates of the War Ministry and they were there within the quarter hour, their clearing control dividing the city traffic for them. They would have taken almost as long in the pneumatic.

They spoke only once during the ride. Ross Westley spending the time in hurried attempt to think this all out.

He had said, "Who else will be there?"

"That remains to be seen, my son," the other said smoothly.

The car took them to a back en-

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trance, through highly guarded byways, and the major of the Surety men posted there did no more than take in the car's insignia before coming to the salute.

They stepped out of the luxurious vehicle and Ross stood to one side to let the berobed older man precede him. He followed in silence. The Temple vicars remained outside, still seated in their car.

At the entry, they passed two more guards one of whom was seated at a control board. A light flickered red.

The other Surety agent stepped before them respectfully, but with his right hand only inches from his holstered sidearm.

"Co-aide," he said to Ross, "you're carrying a shooter."

Ross looked at him. "I'm a full Deputy and the country's at war. Why shouldn't I carry a shooter?"

"Sorry, Co-aide Deputy. You'll have to leave it here."

Ross looked at the Temple bishop who nodded benignly.

He shrugged, brought the gun from his shoulder holster and tendered it to the guard, then followed after the older man.

There were four more guards before a heavy door. Two of them flung it open, somewhat dramatically Ross thought, upon Temple Bishop Stockwater's approach.

Inside, about a conference table, were those whom, after all, Ross Westley had actually expected to see. Well, there were several others as well. In fact, he was somewhat surprised to find his own Assistant Deputy, Job Bauserman.

There were a full dozen of the Central Comitia and a check revealed all the more important faces, save, possibly, that of Philip McGivern of Socioeconomics. One of the Old Hands, Ross told himself. He had probably not even been approached.

Mark Fielder, the Surety head, broke off the whispered conversation he was having at one end of the room with Marshal Croft-Gordon, and said, smiling his cold smile, "I assume this is all, Co-aides. Shall we call the conference to order?"

He strode to the head of the table and took up the gavel there, saving them, however, from the necessity of hearing it bang.

Ross Westley secured a chair to one end separated by two seats from anyone else. He watched and listened warily.

Mark Fielder had evidently appointed himself spokesman as well as chairman. As soon as they had all found places, he looked out over them suavely and began.

"Co-aides, it hardly need be pointed out that Alphaland is in crisis. Due to the most inept handling of a relatively simple situation, we now face disaster unless strong steps are taken by we assembled here. Frankly, and as is well known to you all, our leader has failed to rise to the occasion."

"Right!" somebody growled.

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"If we are to rescue the situation, we must act with dispatch."

Marshal Croft-Gordon was on his feet, his swagger stick banging his leg. "Then let's stop talking and start acting! I'll tell you this, I'll take no more orders from the arrogant flat!"

Fielder held up a hand, though smiling understanding. "Please, Marshal. Some preliminary decisions must be made."

Jon Matheison, of Finance, called out, "One immediate problem: Who is to step into his shoes? Who among us is strong enough to take over the office of Presidor?"

"Who's Number One, in short?" one of the assistant deputies present called.

Fielder was shaking his head. He looked at Ross Westley and said, "I'm sure our Deputy of Propaganda would agree with me in this. It is not going to be enough to remove the present Presidor and place another in his office. The people are going to want the outer semblance, at least, of a complete change. That we can sell. Am I right, Co-aide Westley?"

Ross shifted in his chair, all eyes upon him. "If you can sell them a change at all, it had better be something revolutionary, all right. Half measures would be probably worse than none at all."

"Correct!" the Surety head applauded.

Temple Bishop Stockwater said worriedly, "Now, my children, let us not become too radical here. We would not wish to disturb established institutions."

Job Bauserman, unduly articulate in this gathering of his superiors Ross thought with some surprise, said, "But we'll have to seem to disturb them, Co-aides. The candidate for office, whether he means to attain it through force or by ballot, promises great reform in the attaining. Living up to it, later, is another matter."

Fielder looked at the propaganda man thoughtfully. "You are quite correct, of course, Co-aide. We must promise them the moon as the ancient expression goes."

Matheison said, "And later deliver green cheese."

Fielder took direction again. "So simply changing the Presidor would be insufficient. I propose, Co-aides, that a triumvirate be nominated here, this afternoon. And that elections be promised within a year after our coming to power."

"Elections!" the marshal blurted, unbelievingly. "You mean *real* elections?"

The Temple bishop, too, led the objections. "My son, much though I am in sympathy with democratic institutions, and look forward to the day when they are practical, surely it is realized by all present that our good people are not, at present, capable of voting intelligently. They lack, ah, the educational background, the, ah, intelligence. Until

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they are arrived at a higher level than now prevails, it resolves upon we of the, ah, better classes to lead them."

Ross Westley looked at the holy man. It was a cry heard down through the ages. He wondered if Stockwater had ever read of the fact that most primitive man, long before the advent of writing, not to speak of education, ruled himself democratically. Not that Ross had any intention of bringing forth the subject in this gathering.

Fielder held up a hand again, the hand holding the gavel, and chuckled without humor. "Co-aides, please. You evidently failed to hear me. I said that we would *promise* elections. Once in power, various emergencies can arise, a threat of the Karlists attempting to put their own candidates on the ballot, or some such. We can face such problems when they confront us, certainly no one suggests mob rule."

"Amen," the Temple bishop murmured.

Fielder pressed on. "A ruling triumvirate, fraternally united, will be a departure from one-man control, such as the Presidor has exercised. It will seem and on the surface be, a radical change and appear to herald still more definite reform. However, in actuality, such a triumvirate will continue to reflect the desires of this, our body, the Central Comitia."

Bauserman said, "I suggest that the name of the Comitia be changed, as well as the title of every official in it, save, of course, the representative of the United Temple." Here he nodded his head to the Temple bishop. "The Temple, of course, remains unchanging, as it should be, down through the ages. But the Commissariat of Finance should have its name changed to such as the Ministry of the Treasury. The Commissariat of Information should become the Department of Public Knowledge."

Fielder was nodding, encouragingly. "Co-aide Bauserman is obviously to be a valuable member of the new regime. We must make as many surface changes as possible."

Somebody called, "All right, but who's to be on this triumvirate?"

Fielder looked at the speaker. "Amongst ourselves, of course, we are co-aides and equals. The actual trio will be meaningless. I suggest we now nominate our three figureheads, our supposed chiefs of state."

Ross grunted inwardly. Figureheads, his aching back. He already knew who was to succeed Number One, given a success of this Putsch. And he suspected strongly that it had been worked out long ago.

Matheison called, "I nominate Marshal Croft-Gordon, our most noted hero. Next to the present Presidor, certainly the best known public figure in Alphaland."

"Second," someone called. Ross noted idly that the seconder was in uniform.

"Our chairman, Co-aide Fielder," someone else called.

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The holder of the gavel held up a hand. "Now, consider well, Co-aides. Remember, in actuality, our three will be but figureheads for this Comitia. However, is it wise that a police official be in the group?"

"Absolutely," Bauserman called. "The military and police must be seen to be represented. The iron fist within the silken glove."

"Second the motion," Franklin Wilkonson, the geopolitician, called out.

One of the Old Hands, Ross told himself bitterly. Shoulder to shoulder with Number One on the barricades. He ran his mind back through history to the Old Bolsheviks and their being weeded out almost to the man by Stalin, and of Hitler and his purge of Roehm and the old Brown Shirts. And further back still to Octavius Augustus and his elimination, over the years, of all who had supported him during the civil wars following the death of Caesar.

"Jon Matheison," someone else called out and was seconded.

Ross nodded to himself. He had called it. Croft-Gordon, Fielder and Matheison. The other two didn't know it, but eventually that triumvirate was going to slim down to one man, again. He might not call himself the Presidor, but eventually, Ross had no doubt, Mark Fielder would stand alone at the head of government. Neither of the other two had the capability to hold ultimate power.

He listened, but, largely unhearing, as they droned through other proposals.

Finally, Fielder brought it to the crux. "We are, then, in complete agreement. Number One has failed us. It is our duty to take over the reins of government."

"Who's going to bell the cat?" Ross said, evenly.

All eyes came to him, most faces frowning.

Ross said, "Who's going to take on the job of getting through Number One's Surety and informing him he has just been demoted from the job he's held for almost half a century?"

Fielder pursed his lips. "That has been worked out, Co-aide. Marshal Croft-Gordon, Deputy Matheison and I will request audience with the Presidor. We will inform him of the changes."

"And what will his guard have to say about that?"

Fielder arched his eyebrows. "My dear Co-aide Westley, it is I who appoint the Surety guards who protect the Presidor."

Ross nodded. He should have known the answer. Evidently, Number One was not to survive the audience with his three top deputies.

Fielder repeated himself. "We are, then, in complete agreement?"

Ross, who had been slouched in his chair, trying to keep from contemplating the result of what he knew he was going to do, came deliberately to his feet. He looked

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around at the rest of them, one by one. Deep within himself he was amazed. All this was not in his basically retiring nature.

"I guess this is the vote," he said. "This is where we take our stand."

He looked at Wilkonson. "I understand that you, Co-aide, along with my father and Number One, were one of the original revolutionary committee. One of the handful who revolted against the takeover of the Karlists. Who else is left of that group? Only Academician McGivern, I suppose, the party theoretician. I notice Co-aide McGivern isn't here."

Fielder said coldly, "He met with an unfortunate accident, shortly after being approached, Co-aide."

Ross nodded. He looked at Marshal Croft-Gordon, who appeared to be building up a head of steam. "And the good marshal, although not an Old Hand, also fought in the war, if party history serves me. At first as a sergeant, but under the wing of Number One he rose quickly in rank until at last he is supreme head of the military."

Ross turned his gaze on Mark Fielder. "And our good Deputy of Surety. As I recall, a nephew of one of the now deceased Old Hands who recommended him highly to Number One. And he, as a favor, saw our present chairman, and triumvir to be, promoted and promoted again."

Fielder said ominously, "What are you getting to, Co-aide?"

Ross shrugged. "Isn't it obvious, Co-aides? I am the son of Franklin Westley, another of the Old Hands. Frankly, I am a misfit in my position. However, I am not a traitor, although I find myself at times critical of our present government. My single vote is against this coup d'etat. I suggest instead that the full Central Comitia be convened and that the Presidor be allowed to defend himself before it. If he cannot do so, I suggest that an immediate election be held and a new government be chosen by all elements of the population."

An angry buzz had already started through the room.

But Fielder held up a hand.

He said, his mouth twisted in half mockery, "You will notice, Co-aides, that the Commissariat of Information is represented by Assistant Deputy Bauserman, as well as by the estimable Ross Westley, who by his own confession is a misfit in his position. Co-aide Bauserman was invited to this meeting in anticipation of just such an occurrence as this. Indeed, it was he who first brought to my attention, as Deputy of Surety, the fact that Co-aide Westley is not quite so veracious as he might project when he tells us so nobly that he cannot act the traitor."

"What are you driving at?" Ross growled.

"It was through Co-aide Bauserman that my men first became aware of the fact that Co-aide West-

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ley had fallen under the feminine charms of a Betastan national now known to be a leader of saboteurs, ECE agents and guerrillas taking active action against our forces here in Alphacity and elsewhere. Further, our own ECE agents in New Betatown inform us that the Betastan General Staff is in possession of information that could only have originated in meetings of the Central Comitia."

Fielder's eyes flashed out over the conference table. "This man is a traitor to Alphaland, Co-aides!"

He turned dramatically and pointed to the door. "You will leave at once." His voice a sneer: "*Co-aide* Westley."

Ross took a deep breath, opened his mouth as though to retort, closed it again and shrugged. Without further word, he turned and marched toward the door.

Angry voices echoed after him.

He opened the heavy door and stepped out into the corridor beyond. Two Surety agents fell in step beside him.

"This way," one of them grunted.

They departed the Ministry of War by another route than the one by which he had entered.

He wondered emptily about the scene just through, still amazed at his own temerity. Had he supported Fielder and his gang, would the other have kept the secret of Tilly Trice and his connection with her? He didn't know. Perhaps he could have found a position in the new government for himself, had he kowtowed to the other. It made no difference now. Nor did much else.

He had to smile inwardly in self-deprecation. It was only a matter of time, anyway, before Job Bauserman got his job. The Holy Ultimate knew the man was more capable of holding it.

His two guards ushered him downstairs to a dark garage and to a Surety police semi-armored car. He was hustled into the back seat, a bully-boy on each side, and noted in mild surprise that the vehicle was chauffeur-driven rather than being auto. It must have been designed to be used in rough country where co-ordinates couldn't be dialed.

They took off, zooming up a ramp to the boulevard outside.

"Where are we going?" Ross said, not expecting an answer.

He didn't get it.

The eternal goons, he thought. Down through the ages, I wonder if they've ever changed. Was this the type that Pharaoh once sent to apprehend his rivals? Did Hammurabi have a similar group of the boys to enforce his laws?

They turned a corner, and immediately the driver smashed on brakes. Toward them, careening, was coming a fast moving civilian car, another immediately behind it, as though the two were racing.

Racing? Here in the downtown area of Alphacity? Both cars seemed overflowing with kids.

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The Surety driver swerved desperately, and uselessly. The lead racing car sideswiped them one way. He spun the wheel in desperation. The following car swiped them on the opposite side. There was screaming and rasping of tortured metal.

And over they went, rolling, crashing ultimately against a store front.

And all went black for Ross Westley.

Far, far away, and as though in a dream, he seemed to see Tilly, done up as she had been dressed that day when she told him she belonged to an archery club. In boy's clothing, a Robin Hood type cap on her head. She was bending, now, over one of the Surety men who had been thrown out onto the pavement. She was looking over the papers she had evidently pulled from his pockets, seemingly in no great hurry. She held a small shooter in one hand, as though she was very used to having a shooter in hand.

And then the black rolled in again.

X

He came out of it to feel his head cushioned warmly and to feel the sensation of rapid movement still. Confusedly, he thought it must be impossible. The vehicle in which he rode had turned over.

A faraway voice said, "He isn't hurt badly."

Another voice—was there a feminine quality—said ominously, "He'd better not be. You cloddies are on the precipitous side when it comes to rescues."

Still a third voice said, in defense, "That Surety car was armored, Till. How'd you expect us to take it, especially with such short warning?"

Ross opened his eyes. "What in Zen's happened?" he said.

Tilly Trice grinned down at him. "The cavalry arrived in the nick of time," she said. She patted his head. "Now you relax. We'll have a medico look at you shortly."

His head was in her lap. He closed his eyes again. Who was he to argue?

He tried to make sense of his position.

Evidently, the underground guerrillas were even more highly organized than the Alphaland authorities had suspected. Somehow, they had known of that meeting. Somehow they had suspected his arrest would follow. Somehow they had rescued him, for whatever purpose. It was quite a collection of somehows.

He must have dozed off again. When next he brought his mind to bear on his surroundings, he was being hustled, albeit gently, from the car in which he had been riding into what would appear a most ordinary commercial garage, though of considerable size.

Their vehicle had pulled to the far end where customers could hardly have seen it. He was helped

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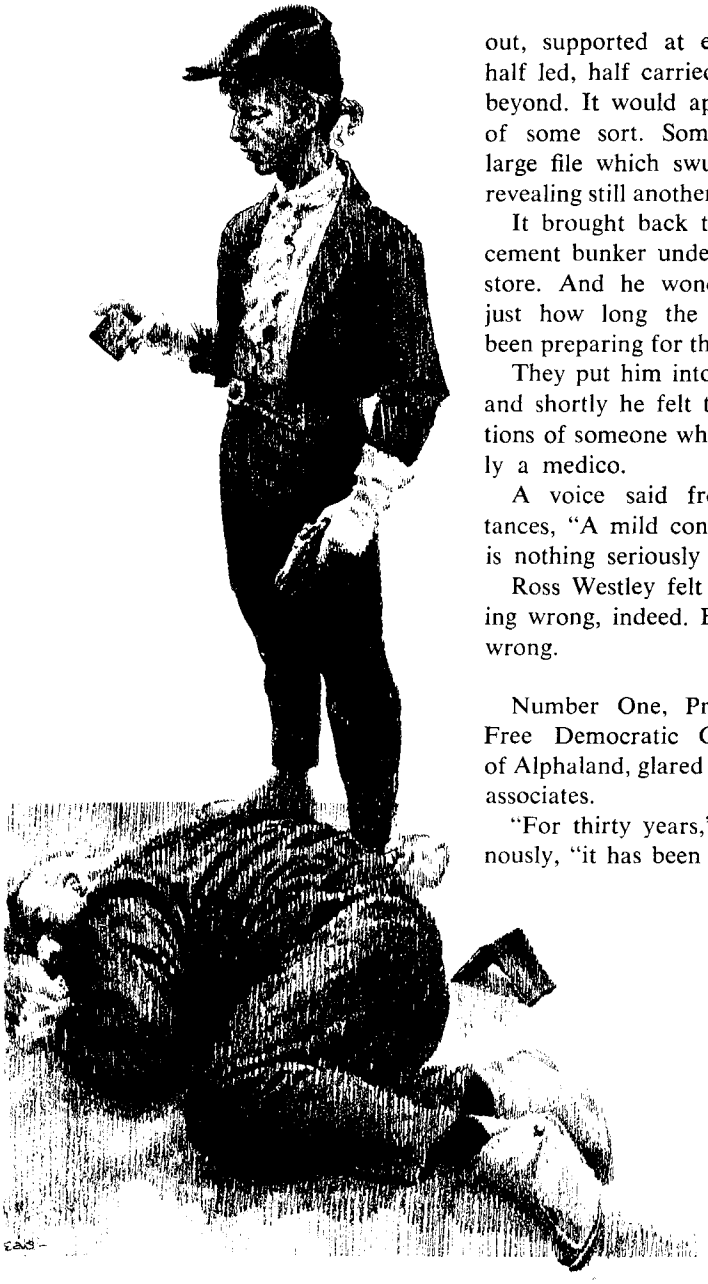

out, supported at each arm, and half led, half carried, into a room beyond. It would appear an office of some sort. Somone pushed a large file which swung on hinges, revealing still another room beyond.

It brought back to memory the cement bunker under Tilly's bookstore. And he wondered vaguely, just how long the Betastani *had* been preparing for this off-beat war.

They put him into a lower bunk and shortly he felt the administrations of someone who was obviously a medico.

A voice said from great distances, "A mild concussion. There is nothing seriously wrong."

Ross Westley felt protest. Nothing wrong, indeed. Everything was wrong.

Number One, Presidor of the Free Democratic Commonwealth of Alphaland, glared at his three top associates.

"For thirty years," he said ominously, "it has been a basic of this

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government that I not be disturbed upon retiring to my private apartments. Even the Presidor needs rest eventually."

Mark Fielder shook his head, as though in regret. "Your Leadership, the most fast rule must on occasion have its exception."

Marshal Croft-Gordon, already dark of face, simply returned his superior's glare.

Jon Matheison was not a man of action. His eyes darted uncomfortably about the room, taking in the bar, the fireplace, and the rounded Pater Riggin seated quietly beside it.

Fielder said to Number One's old companion, "Pater, I suggest you leave. This conference is of first priority."

Pater Riggin's eyes went to his life-long companion.

"Jim?"

Number One, eyes narrow now, said, "Remain where you are, Rig. It occurs to me that I may wish to have witnesses to this indignity, later."

Fielder shrugged, "As you will. It is on your own head, Pater. In the future, you may be sorry to have been a witness."

"I rather doubt it," the Temple monk said mildly. "I am an old man, my son. There are few threats that could frighten me."

Marshal of the Armies Ropert Croft-Gordon rasped, "Let's get to the point!"

"Yes," Number One said, looking at his Surety deputy. "Let us get to the point. The first point is that all three of you are dismissed from your offices."

Jon Matheison giggled nervously.

Mark Fielder let his head go left and right slowly. "That is why we have come. The opposite is true. It is you who have failed in your duties and have been dismissed by the Central Comitia."

The nostrils of the supreme chief of the Alphaland government flared. "The Comita has no power to remove me, as you well know, Fielder. However, we shall immediately convene that body." His eyes went briefly to the Temple monk. "Rig, do me the kindness to summon my guard."

Fielder looked at the seated old man. "Don't bother, Pater. The former Presidor has no guards. In fact, he hasn't had for over a month."

"Are you drivel-happy?" Number One roared.

"They are *my* guards," Mark Fielder said mockingly.

Alphaland's strong man stomped to his private bar, took up a bottle with shaking hand and poured a heavy slug into a tumbler. He took up the glass and spun back to them.

"You fools! You can't attempt this in time of war. The people will tear you apart. Besides all that, it will most likely mean a collapse of the war effort. Civil war at the very least."

Jon Matheison had at last found courage to speak. He shrilled, "It is

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you who would be torn apart. The war's impossibly unpopular. The peace riots are everywhere. We will take power on a platform of ending the war quickly. The Commissariat of Propaganda is ready to release a broadcast from the triumvirate that it will immediately go to Betastan and terminate the war as soon as possible."

Number One threw the drink back over his palate.

"Traitors!" he rumbled. "Surrounded by traitors, supposedly my friends."

Pater Riggin said mildly, "You should have read your Machiavelli better, Jim. Ultimately, a Prince must have no intimate friends."

Marshal Croft-Gordon said, "Enough of this nardy blather. What are we arguing about? It's all over. Call the guards in. Convene the court-martial." He grimaced his hatred, repressed so many years. "The sooner he's liquidated, the better. Anyone flat enough to think in terms of supporting him, will be left leaderless."

Number One poured another drink and chuckled bitter laughter. "Sergeant Croft-Gordon of the paratroopers. No, you weren't so aristocratic in those days, were you, Ropert? It was Ropert Gordon then. The hyphenated Croft, your mother's name, was added after I had promoted you over more capable officers because I was cloddy enough to think you capable of gratitude."

Pater Riggin looked at him wanly and murmured beneath his breath, "Dreamer."

Mark Fielder said, "Enough. Let's go." He made a sour mouth. "You first, *Your Leadership.*" He brought a small handgun from his tunic pocket.

Both the marshal and Jon Matheison did the same.

The marshal motioned with his toward the door.

Number One, still enraged beyond the point of being conscious of physical danger, stood stiff, as though refusing to budge.

Up until this point, Pater Riggin had sat quietly by the fire, the customary ancient book in his lap, one finger holding his place. When he sighed, and set it aside, not an eye followed his movement. He bore not the color to draw interest in this heated conflict between strong men.

He slipped a pale hand into a pocket of his robe and flicked, rather than threw, a small pellet between the group of three and his life-long companion.

It burst into a very fireworks of smoke, bright flame and—they were soon to find—nausea gas.

He came erect, surprisingly nimble for such a sedentary type. There was a handkerchief at his nostrils. He bustled forward, grasping the disposed dictator by the arm.

"Quickly now, Jim. This way."

A beam from Fielder's gun burned a ray across the room, striking nothing save a tapestry on a far wall.

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The marshal was shouting incoherently.

Mark Fielder spun around and was pounding upon the door through which he had entered ten minutes before. "Guards! Guards!"

Jon Matheison had slipped to the floor and was holding his throat.

The Temple monk's grasp was surprisingly firm. "This way, Jim. Holy Ultimate, move!"

Number One's eyes were streaming and already his stomach and lungs seemed to churn. He stumbled along, his mind reeling at the developments of the quarter hour.

He was led through a room, back through a passage. He knew his own quarters, of course, but the confusion was upon him to the point that he didn't know which way he went.

Suddenly the air was clear and he was in an alleyway. Vaguely he recognized it, though circumstances had not taken him this way for so many years he could not remember. It was some sort of servant entrance.

Pater Riggin, slight tremor in his voice, said ruefully, "We may now pray to the Holy Ultimate that our good Deputy of Surety did not go to the bother to completely surround the Presidor's palace. Remain here for a moment, Jim. Please don't stray. I am an old man and cannot handle too many variables. Besides," there was a wry humor, "I am not too practiced in rescuing deposed chiefs of state."

He was gone.

Number One, the gas relieving him of all dignity, leaned against the stone of the alleyway and vomited desperately. His eyes burned so that he could hardly see, his stomach churned.

The voice of Pater Riggin was back.

"Here. In here, Jim. Quickly. They'll burn their way through those doors in moments."

The former dictator was hustled into a small two-seater hover-car. He knew not why, nor whence they were bound. And cared not.

Ross Westley had awakened almost a full hour earlier, but had not brought attention to himself. There were half a dozen others in the long barrackslike room, but none that he recognized. Three or four of them were obviously wounded, since they were bandaged. He suspected the others were, too. They were remaining in their bunks, similar to his own situation.

He considered his position. Obviously, his need was escape.

But how, and to where? He could think of no place to go. Once again, he had been a long-term fool. He was enough of the historian to know that in the past high-ranking officials of totalitarian regimes made a practice of establishing funds in a secure foreign land, or more than one. Given collapse of government or personal misadventure, one could then live out one's life in luxurious retirement.

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But not he! What a flat! What a common yoke, not to have feathered his nest when resources were unlimited.

But this wasn't the time for self-recrimination. He had to act. Now. Immediately. He was in the hands of the enemy.

But at that he had to smile his self-deprecation. Who wasn't the enemy? He had no friends.

It occurred to him that it had been a long time since Ross Westley had had friends. What top government deputy of a totalitarian regime had friends? Drinking companions, had he wanted them, in large number, in spite of the anti-alcoholic restrictions of the United Temple, yes. Blondes, brunettes, redheads, or any combination of the three, yes. Mopsies galore to anticipate his any variation of vice, were he so inclined, yes. Those to fawn, those to agree with his silliest statement, those to encourage him on to any secret desire, yes. But a friend?

He thought of Tilly Trice.

Yes, Till. She had milked him of information, when he was infatuated with her, and now, at the end of the road, had given the final humiliation of kidnapping him.

And at that point, Tilly herself entered the bunker, immediately followed by Centurion Combs and a dozen others of the youthful appearing guerrillas that were her command.

Combs, his face whitish, had his right arm in a sling. Two of the others seemed to bear minor wounds. Tilly herself was filthy dirty, as though she had rolled on the ground. She had lost her Robin Hood cap and her hair, short-cut, was a mess.

However, she managed to come up with a characteristically pert grin when she saw he was awake.

"Hi, lover-mine," she said, coming over. "Those Surety men of yours are beginning to look a little more stute. They're catching on to even the better of our little fun and games bits. They're evidently now in the silly position of arresting all boy scouts and such uniformed teenage groups."

He shook his head. "It's just a matter of time. They'll get you."

She twisted her small mouth. "Perhaps. But there are others. Besides, it's not just us, any more. Your own people are beignning to take to the field. This country is becoming one fouled up confusion, Rossie."

She sat down on a stool next to his bed. "How are you feeling?"

He said in a burst of candor, "I'm fine. I've just been figuring out a plan of escape."

"Escape," Combs said curtly, over a cup of coffee he'd just drawn for himself one-handed, from a huge urn on a mess table. "Did you labor under the illusion we'd stop you?"

"That'll be all, Centurion," Tilly Trice said.

Ross scowled at her. "You mean I'm free to go?"

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"Why not? Have you some place better to be?"

Then it came back to him the circumstances under which he had been seized by the Betastan irregulars. He flushed.

"I suppose I should be thanking you."

"Oh, don't bother," one of the other seeming youngsters grinned. "It was no trouble at all, getting you away from those Surety goons."

"Shut up, Alshuler," Tilly said. She looked back to Ross. "What're your plans, Rossie?"

"I have none," he said bitterly. "Fielder, Croft-Gordon and the rest are overthrowing Number One. I don't know why I didn't string along. I suppose it was because of the old man. He wasn't really very smart about politics, but he was, well, loyal. He thought Number One was the only answer to combat the Karlists. I couldn't betray his memory, I suppose."

Combs looked at him and then at Tilly, his expression surly. At what, Ross didn't know. Combs didn't seem to think much of Ross Westley.

Tilly turned to another of the guerrillas who stood to one side, ultra-weary, a cup of coffee in one hand. He had been watching, unspeaking.

She said, "Manuel, you'd better get that on the air. Either Number One is overthrown, or, if not, our broadcasting it will precipitate the crisis. In fact, it'd help if Alphaland first heard of his mutinied deputies from a Betastan source."

Manuel put the coffee down and said, "It's doubtful if there's a station left in Betastan capable of planetwide broadcasting. The Alphaland troops have overrun them all." But he moved toward a corner of electronic equipment at the far end of the bunker.

Tilly said, "We don't need a station of our own. Just so we can beam the information to a neutral. If there are any neutrals left."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Ross scowled up at her. He began to feel foolish, remaining in his bunk after admitting that nothing was wrong with him—especially since the others seemed so completely exhausted, Tilly included. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat erect, preparatory to coming to his feet.

"About the neutrals? They're lining up, Rossie." Her mouth twisted wry humor. "And I'm afraid in choosing sides, yours hasn't come up with many pals."

She had slumped down on a bench at the mess table nearest him, and he changed his mind about standing.

He shook his head at her. "I don't see how you've done what you have. Admittedly, you've shot your bolt by now; your government is in hiding, your army has deteriorated into small units, except in a few places like the Tatra Mountains. Your navy is scattered or

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sunk, and your air fleet either shot down or in hiding at minor fields. But what amazes me is that you were able to hold out as long as you have. The computers . . ."

Combs chuckled sourly, as he drew some more coffee. "You've been listening to your own propaganda, fella. We're still going strong. It's you Alphaland yokes who're disintegrating. Sure, our army has split up into small units. That was the plan. Sure, maybe half our navy has been sunk. It's expendable. But where's your merchant fleet, eh? It's not doing so well. And what's the effect on your economy? Fella, this war is just getting under way."

Ross looked at Tilly rather than the speaker and he was frowning.

Tilly said, reasonably, "Rossie, never underestimate the enemy. Never expect him to do what you want him to do."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Your Marshal Croft-Gordon and his general staff, with all their computers. Figuring out exactly what we would do, were we logical and consistent. Figuring out just where we would logically make our stand. How we would defend our cities against your bombers and missiles. How our fleet would sail forth to do what it could against your stronger, more numerous vessels. Don't you see the only answer, Rossie?"

He continued to scowl his lack of understanding.

"Rossie, we simply couldn't be logical and consistent. Your computers were exactly right. They were quite infallible . . ."

"Ha!" he snorted.

". . . If we had been logical and consistent, or, worse still, if we had resorted to our own few computers to give us our answers to problems military."

She shook her head. "Rossie, what is the best defense against a mechanized army, complete with every latest device of the military, including computer-brains and data banks containing every bit of military information accumulated on any of the United Planets?"

He looked at her blankly.

She continued. "What is the defense against a man in an ultra-tank, with the firepower at his control to equal a division."

He was still blank.

She told him. "A man with a pair of pliers and perhaps a knife, a shotgun. Of course, a small amount of dynamite or even more efficient explosive helps also. Rossie, have you ever heard of the Yugoslavian, Tito?"

"Vaguely."

"Very well. Along about the middle of the Second War, the Germans decided that Yugoslavia was needed in their camp. In a matter of days, they had sent an ultimatum, bombed Belgrade, the capital, into ruins, dispatched their

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panzers down the roads of the little country, capturing every town that counted. The king fled, the army capitulated. The whole world realized that little Yugoslavia had been defeated, as so many of the smaller European nations had been defeated by the Nazi hosts."

She looked at him mockingly, "Everybody realized the defeat but the Yugoslavians. They took to the mountains. Small groups at first, slowly, to be united. They fought, initially as individuals or in small squads. Slowly they grew to company, brigade, regimental and then division size. Large areas were under their domination, though the cities and roads remained in German hands. By the time of Stalingrad, the Germans had two full Army Corps tied up in Yugoslavia fighting Tito and his partisans. You're a historian. Do you remember the significance of Stalingrad, Rossie? It was the turning point of the war. Adolph the Aryan could have used those two army corps at the time of crisis."

He nodded, slowly, "So you decided to follow the example of Tito?"

"Oh, more than that. We improved considerably. You see, in the past, Rossie, guerrillas were found in their own country after it had been overrun by the enemy. But we extrapolated in the field of partisan warfare and decided to carry it into the aggressor land. In the past, saboteurs were single individuals who stealthily crept about planting an occasional bomb here, blowing up a bridge there, gimmicking up some valuable machinery on the other place. We decided on parlaying that up to a grander scale. We planted, when we could see the chips were all soon to be down, thousands of saboteurs-to-be here in your"—she made her moue —"Free Democratic Commonwealth.

"But that obviously wasn't going to be enough. We also acted illogically in not utilizing our fleet to protect our coasts against your own ships. We let our coastal cities capitulate, undefended, and our ships struck at your Achilles heel, your economy. Nor did our army stand bravely and attempt to defend our frontiers, as your computers expected. Instead, they cut for the rear, giving up space in return for finding a better field of battle. Or, indeed, splitting up and becoming guerrillas on our own soil."

Tilly came to an end, with a pert snort. "Combs is right, Rossie. We haven't *begun* to lose this war, at this point."

Ross stood and walked over to the coffee urn, his face in puzzlement.

As he drew his cup of coffee, his back to her, he said slowly, "All right, but let's take the long view. You're possibly familiar with the reasons Number One felt the war had to be precipitated. It was either that or economic collapse on

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the part of Alphaland, the strongest power on this planet. What follows such a collapse, Till? How many of the neutral economies are tied in with that of Alphaland, how many currencies backed by the gold Alpha?"

He turned and faced her when his cup was full. "Take the long view. Suppose you attain your goal. Alphaland's economy collapses. What will we have left, a vacuum for the Karlists to fill?"

A voice from the door said, "What's wrong with the Karlists?"

Ross turned his head. It was a roly-poly man in the robes of a Temple monk.

"Pater Riggin," Tilly exclaimed in welcome.

XI

"Is that coffee?" the Temple monk said, making his way to the urn.

Combs stood there, cup in hand, scowling at the newcomer. He made no motion to get out of the way.

Most of the others in the room, those of the guerrillas who were not confined to their bunks, made their way toward the Temple monk, the larger number grinning.

The newcomer looked at Centurion Combs slyly, "I suspect, my son, that you have little respect for my cloth."

Combs said ungraciously, "Very little."

The Temple monk looked about the mess table, noted that there were no clean cups and took up a dirty one. He began to fill it, saying, "Then that makes two of us, eh?"

"What was that?"

"Um-m-m. Haven't you ever heard the old saying that the more one knows of one's religion, the less one believes?"

Combs was, on the face of it, taken aback. He stuttered, indignantly, "If you're saying what I think you're saying, then why not get out of that costume you're wearing?"

The older man laughed at him. "My dear boy, look who's talking. Your own costume isn't exactly the uniform of the country you serve, is it?"

"I'm a guerrilla!"

Pater Riggin raised shaggy eyebrows. Then in a gesture with his full cup, at them all, said, "And so, I suppose, in a way, am I."

Tilly had come up smiling and had stood silently thus far on the sidelines of the discussion.

She said to Combs, "Sour-puss, knock it. Boys, meet the longest-time guerrilla of us all." She twisted her mouth in her mocking moue. "The espionage agent, the saboteur, the underground operative to shame the most competent."

In his few years in the Central Comitia, Ross Westley had seen Pater Riggin on a few occasions, had even exchanged amenities with him, but although the Temple monk

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was well whispered about in innermost party circles, he had never come to know the man more than in passing. The alter ego of Number One; the man behind the throne; the Svengali to the Presidor's Trilby; the only friend before whom the dictator let down his hair. All this he had heard Pater Riggin called, but he had found no evidence to back the charges.

But now this. The Temple monk in the camp of the enemy, and obviously well known to some, welcome by all, save possibly the juniro officer Combs.

Ross said, "What in the name of the Holy Ultimate are you doing here?"

Pater Riggin, his cup in his left hand, patted his tummy with his right, like nothing so much as a jovial Santa Claus. "I might ask you the same, Co-aide Deputy."

Tilly said, "I'm afraid that handle no longer quite fits Rossie. We had to pull a cloak-and-dagger rescue."

Ross, still confused, snapped, "I am not so sure it was a rescue. When my hearing came up, I would have had my say."

The one called Alshuler laughed lowly.

Tilly tilted her head and looked up at the deposed propaganda head. "Rossie, Rossie. There was to be no hearing. You were on your way to be shot."

A cold went through him, but he demanded, "How do you know?"

Most of those present, now crowded around the table, laughed. They seemed to do a great deal of laughing and joking, Ross realized impatiently. Was it a characteristic of those in continuing extreme danger? A bravado brought on by the proximity of death?

Tilly said, mocking, "How did we know where you were and that you'd be passing that exact spot where we picked you away from Fielder's Surety men, lover-mine? Let me give you an idea of just how well we are worked into the fabric of Alphaland. It was Jet Pirincin, who sits immediately outside your private offices, who smelled a rat when she saw you leave with the Temple bishop. She relayed the message. So we got in contact with one of our other inside people, in Surety, who was able to get the details of what was to happen to you, and where. So, deciding that even though Alphaland might think you expendable, Betastan didn't, we jumped on our horses and dashed off in all directions to the rescue."

Ross was staring at her.

"You mean to tell me that Jet Pirincin is a Betastan agent? And that you also have them planted in the other commissariats in such Surety spots?"

"Certainly not," she said.

"Then what do you mean?"

"Jet Pirincin, my dear Rossie, is a most patriotic citizen of Alphaland. She . . ."

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He interrupted her, blurting, "You don't make any sense at all!"

"She's a Karlist."

He held a long silence, then finally turned to look at Pater Riggin who had been beaming away, whilst sipping his coffee.

"And so are you?" Ross said.

The Temple monk nodded.

Ross turned on Tilly, then shot his eyes to Combs and around at the others. Most of them were grinning and eyeing him expectantly, though he couldn't think why.

It came to his lips before it was fully comprehended in his mind. "So are the rest of you!"

The Temple monk put down his empty cup. He sighed and said, "Let us be seated. I am sure we've all been through a great deal in the past hours. However, this is no opportunity for much rest, and we're even short of time for explanation."

He took his own advice and utilized one of the benches that ran along the mess table. Six or eight of the others, including Ross, Tilly and Combs seated themselves as well, but the others remained standing.

Pater Riggin brought his eyes back to Ross and said, "My son, you do not suppress an ideal by butchering its adherents, unless you are in a position to liquidate them all. Even then it may germinate among others. This most certainly applies to social systems. Decimate the adherents enough and they will go underground, perhaps, but the teachings remain—be they right or wrong—and will hibernate until opportunity presents itself again to make bid for realization.

"Let me think of an example or two. Recall your history of Mother Earth. Following the Second War, a pseudo-communism was enforced upon the European country known as Poland, the inhabitants of which were predominantly Roman Catholic. The leaders immediately took steps to suppress the Church. Did it work? Most certainly not. After twenty years, the population, once approximately ninety percent Catholic, were now over ninety-six percent. And the dictatorship finally had to come to peace with the Church.

"As good an example was the attempt of this same religious organization to stamp out heresy a few centuries earlier. For several hundred years the Inquisition attempted to force Protestants and adherents of other beliefs into its way of thinking. The results? In spite of thousands burnt at the stake, tortured and imprisoned, the results were nil. If anything, the determination of the opposition was strengthened."

"All right," Ross said. "What you're saying is that in spite of Number One's efforts, for the past half century, the Karlist movement remained in existence, underground."

"Correct."

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Ross looked at Tilly, scowling, "But what's this got to do with the extent to which you Betastani have infiltrated Alphaland?"

"Don't be dense, Rossie. Had we been limited to signing up Alphaland traitors and buying the money-hungry, we would have had a small underground indeed. But when we were able to gain the cooperation of a whole socioeconomic movement, comparatively small though its membership might be, we had on our side an organization of dedicated idealists. And that you can't beat when you're in the clutch, Rossie mine."

"Then you're all Karlists!" he snapped.

Pater Riggin put back his rounded head and laughed.

"My son, my son. Please remember that I lived through the civil war, heard the slogans, even helped write the diatribes against the movement. Sat at the side when the leaders, some of whom were long-time friends, were tried and shot. Participated through it all as an active anti-Karlist."

"But you just said . . ."

The older man held up a hand. "To my shame and sorrow, it was not until later that I was able to rise above the slogan level and actually investigate the teachings of these people. It was then that I became converted—much too late to have got myself shot as an adherent."

Ross was scowling at the Temple monk. From the side of his eyes, he could see Tilly Trice watching him intently with an element of worry there. This was obviously of the greatest importance to Tilly. He refused to consider the obvious reason why.

Pater Riggin was more serious now.

"Ross Westley, most great beliefs, ideals, can be summed up in a sentence or two. If they need more, then there is a weakness, the belief in not whole. So then, in your own words, tell me what you think the basic teaching of the Karlists is?"

Ross looked at him. All his life, since he had been a child at his father's knee, the passionate Franklin Westley, he had been subjected to the anti-Karlist teachings. In these, his later years, he had even participated in spreading them. Long, supposedly, after the Karlists had been a danger.

Anti-Karlism was a dogma, a faith. Decades past, the adherents of Number One had dug out every last book or pamphlet written by that organization's leaders and had burnt them. Every novel, ever so slightly tinged, every play, or even verse, that could be accused of Karlist leanings, all destroyed. It came to him now that he, Deputy of Information, had never actually read a true Karlist book or article. Oh yes, books on socioeconomics which had quoted in limited

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amounts from this work or that, the better to criticize and condemn the movement, but the basic works of the enemy? He didn't know, but he doubted if even Number One had them in his private library. Or even Mark Fielder.

His voice, as though in spite of himself, was wild again. "They're anarchists. They want to tear down everything that their betters have built. They want to turn society on its head and let the yokes rule their superiors."

Alshuler said softly, for once without humor, "That, fella, is exactly what we don't want to do. You've been reading your own propaganda again."

Pater Riggin said, "Let me do it for you. In a sentence, Ross Westley, the basic belief of the Karlists is that government should be instituted to help realize the full potentialities of each member of society."

Ross was put to staring again.

He shook his head in disgust. "Any government subscribes to that!"

But Pater Riggin shook his head right back. "Then most of them lie. Because most governments are instituted to maintain the privileges of a minority, against the interest of society as a whole. The interest of society as a whole is to realize the full potentialities of each individual member of society."

Ross continued to stare, his indignation waning.

The older man pressed on. "They will all *say* that is their goal, but they lie. A socioeconomic system based on an aristocracy, such as feudalism, keeps at the helm a nobility that is not necessarily competent. Many an emperor or king, down through the ages, was actually insane. I mention such as Caligula and George Third of England."

Ross said, "What's that got to do with the policy of the government being directed at realizing the full potentialities of the people?"

"My son," the Temple monk said with a twinkle, "if the ultimate head of the government is in a job that has nothing to do with real capabilities and potentialities, what can we expect on lower levels?

"But to go on. Various other socioeconomic systems have been seen in which the possessors of power and wealth dominated government to the benefit of themselves and their immediate relatives and friends. As good an example as any was England during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of Mother Earth. The British writer, Somerset Maugham, once wrote that he had met many of the top leaders of government and was at first surprised at how indifferently intelligent they were. He came to the conclusion that it didn't take particularly intelligent people to run government. Of course, finally, under the administrations of these incompetents, Great Britain became a third-rate power.

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"To go on still further, we find the so-called Communists of the twentieth century. Rip-snorting idealists when first they came to the helm, we soon were able to observe party membership and relationship to ranking members of the hierarchy, counting most when it came to obtaining high office. Ability was not necessarily the thing. The son of Stalin, although known as a problem drinker, quickly became a general of the Air Force; the son-in-law of Khrushchev, soon was top editor of *Pravda*."

The Temple monk was smiling at him. "I submit, Ross Westley, that none of these socioeconomic systems was in truth utilizing the full potentialities of the citizenry. If at the top you do not have the most suited elements guiding the country, certainly all the way down the line nepotism, the power of money, and a score of other factors will hinder many from realizing their most.

"Do you know the real motivation of Number One and his Old Hands when they fought the Karlists in the streets? Whatever the highblown slogans they repeated ad nauseam, in actuality they were fighting to preserve a system of privilege. Your father was fighting to preserve a system under which he could hand down his high office to you, his beloved son, in spite of the fact that you were unsuited to hold it. He must have known so, toward the end of his life, but that didn't prevent him from urging Number One to appoint you to the position. I suspect you do not even like the job as Propaganda Deputy, but so it is. You, though one of the highest ranking officials in Alphaland, would be more suited to be a professor of history, and undoubtedly happier. I suspect Emperor Caligula would have been the better off had he lived under a system where he would have found his own level, based on his true abilities, rather than having been born into the Julian family and being shunted into the Imperium."

The historian in Ross Westley prevented him from being at sea in this. He said slowly, "Perhaps the stated purpose of your organization is very fine. However, I wonder to what extent government is needed for a man to realize his true worth, under any society. Top men will come to the top under any socioeconomic system."

Alshuler leaned forward. "Are you sure? Or are you confusing the fact that the men in control will proclaim that they are top men? Gangsters such as Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Chiang Kai-shek and Franco, to name a handful at one period in history, will shoot their way to power, and then, the propaganda machine in their hands, the schools, entertainment and news media in their hands, will proclaim themselves the top elements of the country, the best and most intelli-

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gent. Who, in Nazi Germany, wasn't led to believe that those who led were the best, most idealistic and dedicated men in the land?"

Pater Riggin took over again.

"Admittedly, some men, of certain types, will struggle to the top given any society. However, many of our most capable are not of this nature. For instance, the early American electrical wizard, Steinmetz, was a cripple. Had he been born a slave in Roman society, he would have been knocked over the head at birth, his potentialities never realized. Some of our artists, poets and such, are not of the caliber to fight. It is no coincidence that the three great poets of the British romantic period, Byron, Shelley and Keats were all protected from want throughout their lives. Byron was a lord; Shelley a baron; Keats came from a well-to-do family. But suppose any of them had been born into a life of child labor in the mills of Manchester? Would any of them have become poets? Their contemporaries, such as Leigh Hunt and Thomas Hood, born into poverty, were possibly their equals in talent, but had to spend their lives doing newspaper work, writing reviews, or humor verse meant for the semiliterate."

Ross said, suddenly impatient, "All right, this could go on forever. The point is, you admit that you're subversives."

Combs said curtly, "Proud of it."

Pater Riggin said, "It's all according to what you're subverting, Ross Westley, whether or not the term is a derogatory one. Jesus was a subversive, and so were Washington and his co-aides."

Ross, feeling irritation at being on the defensive, struck out. "You tell a fine story, *Pater*, but to reinforce Centurion Combs' opinion when you first entered, let me point out that you yourself wear a garb that doesn't exactly proclaim you liberal. You mentioned Washington, did you ever run into this quotation from a co-aide of his, Thomas Jefferson? *'In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection of his own.'* "

Even as he quoted, the words of Temple Bishop Stockwater about the lesson of Mexico came back to him and he finished by saying slowly, "I am afraid your United Temple sees the handwriting on the wall this time and is attempting to repair its public image."

"Too late," Alshuler grinned. "The ball's already begun to bounce."

Ross looked at the subversive Temple monk again. "You haven't explained remaining in the United Temple."

Pater Riggin shrugged his fat padded shoulders. "For one thing, it was the perfect protective covering. But there's another thing,

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Ross." His face lost its humor. "A people get the religion they want and deserve, just as they get the government they want and deserve, on an average and given time. A false religion remains a popular one only so long as the people support it; an antiquated socioeconomic system remains only so long as the people support it."

His chuckle now was sour. "When the majority of the people on this planet no longer accept belief in the Holy Ultimate and the United Temple which represents this conception, then it will wither away. Not before. Attacking the organization physically might drive it underground, but never destroy it. It will be destroyed only by education and man's evolution to a higher level of understanding."

Tilly, who had remained uncharacteristically silent, spoke up. "Rossie," she said, the old mockery in the back of her words, "you're desperately fighting your friends and I suspect that inwardly you know it."

"What is that supposed to mean, Till?" he snapped angrily.

"I think you know. Individuals, no matter of how much good will, are apathetic when it comes to changes in the institutions with which they are familiar. They will put up with almost anything before facing the need of changing basic cultural habits, political forms, religions, or socioeconomic systems. For instance, I suspect that in actuality you believe the United Temple to be parasitical. But all your life you have paid it lip service, and I suspect, too, in argument about the desirability of maintaining the institution, you would drag up some motheaten opinion supporting the need for keeping the ignorant happy, or teaching the basic virtues, or some such. You've been dragging your heels about speaking up and announcing what you truly believe."

He looked at her unhappily.

Alshuler laughed. "Tilly, you sound like a soapbox lecturer, rather than the head of a couple dozen ragged guerrillas."

She snorted back at him. "One's as important as the other, each in its place."

She came to Ross again. "The same apathy applies in the field of political economy. Look back over your history, Rossie, and consider how long some people put up with ridiculous social systems after everyone in the nation, for all practical purposes, knew them to be ridiculous. Look at the Soviets. Long, long after they had achieved their first goal, the building of an industrialized economy, they hung onto that fantastic bureaucracy, perpetuating domination of a highly complicated technology and industry by party politicians. There are other examples contemporary with them, just as ludicrous.

"But that apathy, given a spark,

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can be changed overnight to the desire for changes. Had you suggested, one year before the Declaration of Independence, that complete freedom from England was the only solution to the problems of the colonists, you probably would have been stoned in the streets. Lenin wrote, less than six months before coming to power, that he never expected to live long enough to see the proletarian revolution. And so it goes.

"Rossie, the Karlists have been waiting a long time for this opportune moment. The Alphaland invasion of Betastan was the spark that set things underway. Not only in Alphaland, where your people are already on the streets in revolt against the war and the government of Number One and his Co-aides, but in Betastan as well."

Gonzales, the electronics expert, spoke up for the first time. "And in four or five of the neutrals, according to radio. Karlists in some of those countries were kept from acting, only because they were afraid of the Alphaland air marines intervening if they tried anything, but with this country tied up, the revolt was on."

Tilly's voice went persuasive. "What does it take to bring you around, lover-mine? In your secret heart you've known for a long time where you really stood. Otherwise you wouldn't have been leaking information to me that could be used against Number One."

Ross looked from her to Pater Riggin, to Combs, to Alshuler, to Gonzales and the rest. And then, as though desperately, completely around the circle again.

He stood suddenly. "What do you expect from me?" he demanded.

"Sit down, son," Pater Riggin said mildly. "We'll bring you up to date."

He pursed his plump lips. "In actuality, there has been as much unscheduled change in Betastan as there has been here. At present, real government is in the hands of the guerrillas, the leaders of whom are Karlists. They wish as quick an end of hostilities as possible so that they can present their program to the people for an immediate vote."

"And what is their program?"

"Immediate amalgamation with Alphaland, with the eventual aim of world government."

"WHAT!"

The false Temple monk looked at him without answer.

Ross blurted, "But that's Number One's program!"

Tilly tinkled laughter. The young guerrillas around her chuckled softly.

Pater Riggin said slowly, "Only to a certain point, Ross. To a certain point it is the program of any thinking person. This planet is well suited for a unified government and has been for some time, Betastan and Alphaland being so delicately balanced has stood in the

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way of such a unification. Number One, of course, has wished world rule . . . under Number One and his Co-aides. That is rejected, obviously, by the Karlists. The new government will be decided upon by representatives from all the participating countries, a Constitutional Convention, you might call it, with the basic theory of the Karlists behind it."

Ross slumped back in his seat.

For the moment they didn't disturb him, though watching carefully, waiting for a response that they all seemed to expect. All, perhaps except Centurion Combs who had a cynical expression on his youthful face.

Ross Westley finally took a deep breath and said, "All right. What has all this got to do with me? What is it you want from me?"

A sigh went through them.

Two or three of the exhausted irregulars, as though this was all that had been keeping them from needed rest, went to their bunks.

Pater Riggin quickly outlined the developments of the past twenty-four hours, during which time Ross had been recovering from his concussion.

"Fielder and his triumvirate are making their bid for power. They won't win, eventually, but unless thwarted now, they'll cause endless additional bloodshed."

"What can we possibly do to prevent them?"

The former Temple monk said, "A great deal. The strongest positions they hold are Surety, the Military and Finance, none of which three are particularly popular now for obvious reasons."

"Well," Ross said sarcastically, "We hold nothing."

Pater Riggin arched eyebrows. "To the contrary, we have Number One, himself; you, the Deputy of Information, and Philip McGivern, head of the Department of Socio-economics though he is now hospitalized."

Ross looked at the older man as though he was mad. "You expect Number One to support a Karlist take-over?"

The other smiled and shook his heavy head. "Not exactly. I expect him to combat a take-over by Fielder, Croft-Gordon and Matheison. In his present fury—I might mention, he is not a particularly intelligent man—he is not taking the long view. He would rather pull his whole world down around his shoulders, than see his immediate enemies prevail over *him*. It is a characteristic of dictators, so I understand."

Ross thought about it briefly.

"Well," he said, "you've got your work cut out. Let's say that we could write up a speech for Number One to give. It would call upon everyone to put down their arms and support the movement for a democratic conference to plan a world government. He would resign

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his office, as a gesture of sincerity, call upon Alphaland forces to return to their homeland immediately. I could give another, brief talk to back him. So could Academician McGivern. But there's one bug in the ointment."

Tilly and Pater Riggin looked at him.

"And what is that?"

"They have the communications system in their control, not us."

Tilly yawned mightily and came to her feet. "That's where we come in. Combs! Alshuler! Gonzales! Come on, fellas, all of you. On your feet. Gonzales, put out a general alarm, to all our groups. Project Propaganda goes into effect."

The men in the bunks groaned.

One yelled over, "Why didn't you characters keep on talking? It was like being rocked to sleep."

Gonzales headed for the electronics equipment in the corner and Ross, looking after him, wondered what complicated goldberg devices they could have dreamed up to avoid detection by Mark Fielder's Surety.

He turned to Tilly and said, "How many men can you gather?"

Tilly thought about it, twisting her mouth. "'Bout five hundred to a thousand, as of this morning. Maybe some of them have been killed or taken since then."

Pater Riggin said, "We've got to get working on that speed. Wait for me here. I'll have to check with Jim. He'll be boiling, I've been gone so long from where I've got him stashed out."

"Who's Jim?" Combs growled.

Pater Riggin looked at him. "Number One."

Combs grunted. "It never occurred to me the cloddy had a first name."

Pater Riggin murmured, "Everybody has a first name—to the right person." He added softly. "It's been a task remaining that right person for so many years, waiting for this moment." He was gone.

The room was a bedlam as men sought their weapons and other equipment.

Ross and Tilly Trice stood alone, momentarily, looking into each other's faces.

"And when it's all over?" he said.

"Like I said," she told him.

It all hit him at once. He said in pure astonishment, "But you people have won. And you haven't had the use of a single computer to figure it out."

She grinned at him mockingly.

"Oh, I've had a computer. So've we all."

He scowled at her, uncomprehendingly.

She tapped her head. ■

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Bite

A computer, being logical,
can follow rules without trouble.
A man, being judicious
rather than merely logical—
may be damned if he does.

LAWRENCE A. PERKINS

"Dirty little bugger!" snarled Dr. Albert Hoganth, pressing a neatly folded white handkerchief to his hand and viciously kicking the open bag of peanuts at his feet. Cursing methodically, he held the compress for several minutes and then folded it back to inspect the wound.

He could see at once what had happened. The sharp little teeth of the squirrel had caught him in the fold of skin on his pudgy right hand between thumb and forefinger, just short of the metacarpal bone. Anxiously he tested his ability to move his forefinger. He winced at the fresh pain, but the finger moved freely. The wound did not look at all serious.

Clumsily rewrapping the blood-stained bandage, Dr. Hoganth set off toward his sanitary white house. The wound was beginning to throb, and he walked a little faster as he reached the last of the trees. As he approached his house, he gave a squirrel-sized rock a very satisfying kick. Alice, his wife, was puttering about in the rose garden, and her china-blue eyes widened at the sight of the bloody wrapping on his hand.

"Did you hurt yourself, dear?" she asked, straightening up anxiously and absently wiping a wisp of straw-colored hair out of her face with the back of her hand.

"Of course not!" he barked, holding out his injured hand. "This is catsup, and I put it on to astonish the neighbors."

In his sanitary white bathroom he awkwardly swabbed the four painful punctures, which were already showing angry red rims. He poured on antiseptic and then managed to bandage himself with his left hand, meanwhile resolving to buy a small shotgun immediately. He could not tolerate the thought that any of the treacherous race of peanut-fed squirrels should continue to live.

Dr. Hoganth had found the little woods soon after taking possession of his residence. The woods were full of hungry and clamorous squirrels, and he had soon learned that their hunger would force them to

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eat directly from his hand. He delighted in the sense of power that it gave him to coerce them, and he savored every timid quiver as they approached him in agonies of fear.

But now they knew and trusted him, and Dr. Hoganth had already begun to lose enthusiasm for his hobby. A fearless squirrel was no fun. And today one of the nasty little rodents had charged straight toward him, ignored the bait peanut, and bitten him. Bitten Dr. Albert Hoganth, internationally recognized expert on ductless gland function and malfunction!

"Walked right up to me like he owned the place," he expounded at coffee break next morning to Dr. Edwin Thurwill of the neurological clinic, "and never even looked at the peanut. Just sank his dirty little teeth into me." He smirked. "But it won't bite anybody else. Not that one." He stirred his coffee vigorously with his left hand.

Thurwill's brown eyes widened. "You mean you killed it?"

"Stomped it to death." In remembered rage, Hoganth began talking faster. "What did you think? That I took the little vermin home and tucked it into bed in my guest room?"

Thurwill spooned sugar into his coffee, spilling much of it on the tablecloth. "Well, as a matter of fact, yes. Uh, not tucked it in bed, of course, but kept it in some kind of cage. If you could step on it, surely you could have got hold of it. I suppose you know that there've been several reports recently of rabid animals in this county."

"Nonsense!" snapped Hoganth. "I don't feed rabid animals."

Thurwill filled his lungs preparatory to making an impassioned rebuttal and then exhaled. Not only was Hoganth head of the ductless gland clinic at Heirblatt University Hospital; he was a close personal friend of Dr. Donald Ardling, head of the hospital. Hoganth was bitterly jealous, and everyone knew how dangerous—and touchy—he could be.

Thurwill knew more about rabies than he cared to remember, yet he reluctantly washed his hands of Hoganth. Of the three former department heads who had incurred Hoganth's ill will, two were now general practitioners thousands of miles away and the third was selling medical encyclopedias. Thurwill had a family to support and a reputation to maintain.

Ed Thurwill would gladly have forgotten the episode—he had once been in charge of an eight-year-old girl who had died hideously of rabies—but Hoganth kept the incident alive by boasting at every morning coffee break about the number of trusting squirrels that had fallen before his new shotgun. There were a limited number of tables in the doctors' snack bar, and isolation was not altogether possible.

Mercifully, there was a limit to the number of squirrels that contin-

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ued to trust a Hoganth armed with a lethal shotgun. Other topics prevailed at the doctors' snack bar, and six months passed before Hoganth pointedly sought out Thurwill's table at the morning coffee break.

"Ed, you're a specialist in neurology and all that," Hoganth demanded, "what's the matter with my hand? It itches like the devil all the time right here"—Hoganth pointed to the faint scars of squirrel teeth—"but when I try to scratch, I can't seem to feel anything. Makes me nervous. I like to keep in top condition all the time. Can't put up with any sort of weakness. What do you think?"

Thurwill, vividly recalling the unspeakable agonies of the eight-year-old girl—she had had freckles, he remembered, and a turned-up nose—struggled for words. No, no, it couldn't be! Not even Hoganth. How that girl had shaken the bars of her enclosure, uncomprehending, wracked, and doomed!

"Tell you what," temporized Thurwill, "I'll have a word with Ardling today or tomorrow, if I can get hold of him, but we'd better admit you for observation."

"Because my hand itches?" shouted Hoganth, standing up so abruptly that his chair fell over with a crash that he completely ignored. "You must be out of your mind! Hah! Build up your department at someone else's expense. Forget it!" He stalked away, scratching the numb spot on his hand.

But Thurwill had no intention of forgetting it. What had been that eight-year-old girl's name? Ardling was a hard man to find; Thurwill privately thought of him as His Royal Rotundity. This time it took just over four hours to locate a thoroughly annoyed Ardling relaxing at an Adriatic resort in Yugoslavia.

Thurwill quickly explained his suspicions, but Ardling obviously was massively unconvinced. Desperately, Thurwill threw in his clincher. "But, sir! What will the public think if a member of our staff dies of one of the most horrible diseases on earth—and the postmortem comes from some private practitioner? What would that make us look like?"

Silence on the transatlantic line indicated that Ardling was thinking. "Very well. Very well," responded the reluctant voice. "Very well. I believe there's a state quarantine law. I'll invoke it—but you'd better be right!"

Hoganth never knew who had reported him. He appeared at the neurological clinic in the custody of a State patrolman, and his rage at having been picked up by the police was surpassed only by his fulminating fury when he learned that he would be Ed Thurwill's patient.

But Hoganth clinched his position as a patient the following day when he began insisting that his water was poisoned and further complained of a splitting headache.

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Thurwill went through the motions of trying to reach His Rotundity again, but Ardling had no intention of having his vacation interrupted a second time and had buffered himself accordingly. Thurwill, therefore, called a meeting of his section.

"There's not a doubt in my mind," he summarized, "but that Hoganth is infected with rabies. His description of the animal that bit him is classical, and his own symptoms are unmistakable. If only he hadn't killed the animal without even preserving the body so that we could have run a mouse test! Or if he'd let us begin the Pasteur treatment while there was still time!"

"But he didn't!" protested Delcher, an assistant. "So what is this meeting for?"

"Most of you probably remember our work on poliomyelitis. The Salk and Sabin programs cut us off, of course—no point in curing a disease that nobody catches any more. But we were close to a cure—we may even have *had* a cure for the primary infection. And polio has much in common with rabies. Both are viral infections that attack the central nervous system."

"What do you mean?" Delcher blurted.

"I mean that in the present state of the art, there's no known cure for rabies. Unless we come up with an answer, Dr. Hoganth is doomed to suffer and die of the most horrible disease known to man."

"Let him!" shouted a man, and there was a quick hum of conversation.

"All right, let's have quiet!" demanded Thurwill. "I'm perfectly aware that Dr. Hoganth would never win a popularity contest. But I wouldn't wish my worst enemy to die of rabies. Besides, if we can cure him, we have established a treatment which should work for anybody. I've taken the Oath of Hippocrates, and I intend to abide by it." He shut his eyes briefly, remembering the eight-year-old girl.

"What do you have in mind?" Delcher conceded.

"Antibiotics don't work on viruses," Thurwill reminded his staff, "but our 501K doesn't seem to be exactly an antibiotic. It's produced by a virus rather than a bacterium. That was one of the things we never resolved. But we'd had good results, and were about ready to publish when the Salk vaccine came out. And Sabin finished us. Our 501K worked only on the primary infection; it didn't do a thing for patients already crippled."

"We all know that!" shouted a woman in the back of the room.

"Rabies has much in common with polio," Thurwill calmly continued. "It's a virus, and it attacks the central nervous system. The symptoms also begin abating just when the polio victim gets his permanent damage and when the rabies victim dies of exhaustion. That's not much to go on, of course, but it's all we've

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got. If we let the disease run its course, Hoganth dies—and, after all, he *is* a member of our clinic."

"And if it doesn't run its course?" a nurse wanted to know.

"I hardly need mention that experimentation on humans is discouraged," Thurwill answered. "But in this case, we have absolutely nothing to lose. Unless we step in now our patient has exactly one hundred percent probability of death. Except for bats and just possibly opossums, no mammal ever survives rabies once the first symptom appears. If 501K happens to be a cure—it's a cure. The alternative is 'supportive treatment'—a nice way of saying 'let him die'."

"If only it wasn't Hoganth!" a lab technician complained.

"I'm glad it is Hoganth," retorted another technician. "I enjoy the notion of using him as a laboratory animal. I'd hate to see a human run a risk like this—but Hoganth?"

"What do you want from us?" Delcher demanded loudly.

"I want a mandate. I'm in charge, of course, and I'm responsible. Remember that. But I wouldn't want to commit this clinic to a radical course without a vote of confidence. You have reputations, too. I'm going to ask Dr. Delcher to give each of you a slip of paper. Write 'yes' if you want Hoganth to get 501K, 'no' if you don't. Then fold the slip."

The room was sepulchrally quiet as Delcher passed out the slips. But as he began collecting them, whisperings quickly swelled to a disorderly roar. Thurwill silenced the gathering by rapping for order. "I have counted the votes," he announced. "Thirty-six for treatment; eleven for no treatment." He quelled another outburst by pounding with his fist. "Will all of you who worked on the final phase of 501K please be here at eight tomorrow? Thank you: that's all."

Hoganth went through all of the frightful symptoms of earth's most frightful disease—the spasms of suffocation, the convulsions, the anxiety, all of it—even though Thurwill injected his patient twice daily with 501K. But when Hoganth reached the stage when he was again able to swallow, he continued to live. He was alarmingly weak, but he was alive.

Nobody dared say it for a whole week. Charlotte Bianchi, looking at the patient's chart as Thurwill made his morning rounds, first put it into words. "Doctor, it's been a whole week since he began swallowing again. I don't understand this temperature rise—but is that a symptom of the disease? I think he's going to make it."

"The temperature rise?" Thurwill took the chart and peered at it. "Who knows? Nobody has ever observed a human rabies patient at this stage of the disease before. But I'm inclined to agree with you. Yet one thing bothers me."

"What is that, Doctor?"

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"You may remember that I mentioned that bats—and possibly opossums—can be healthy carriers of rabies. I can't help but wonder if our patient might be such a healthy carrier. How can we know? Until now no human has ever survived the disease."

"But can't you tell? Can't you test? Can't . . . ?" the nurse stammered to silence. As a new member of the select fraternity of those who have observed human rabies, she still had an acute horror of it.

"Yes, I suppose I can test. The saliva should be infective if my hunch is right. Hm-m-m. I told the clinic that it was too late for a mouse test, but I was wrong. All right, nurse? Let's visit the patient."

Hoganth was no longer under physical restraint, and he was free of the pathological anxiety which had caused him to see plots and poisons in everything. But he continued to be Albert Hoganth. It should have been easy to obtain a saliva sample. In Hoganth's case, the nurse was driven to subterfuge; slyly she slipped a small cotton swab into his mouth along with a thermometer—rejoicing that he did permit at least the thermometer.

Hoganth's temperature rise continued, and Thurwill began to suspect pneumonia—Death's favorite second choice when a killer disease missed. And the mouse brain-injected with Hoganth's saliva died three days later—of rabies.

The day that the lab reported, Thurwill ruminatively dropped in on Hoganth in the middle of the afternoon. Hoganth had always been an utter curmudgeon, of course, but surely there were limits. "Congratulations, Albert," he began, "you seem to be the first human in recorded history to have recovered from rabies. And you might congratulate me on having discovered the cure."

"I might have known there'd be a catch in it," Hoganth grumped. "And how do you know that I really had rabies? I'm not dead, am I? I've never believed in your diagnosis, not for a minute. Oh, yes, I've been sick. I've been very sick. Now I'm better, small thanks to you. I have a strong constitution, a very strong constitution, and I've always kept myself fit. Hah!"

"I was only joking about the congratulations." Thurwill's grave expression, however, failed to express humor. "But there's no doubt about the disease. Albert, you're a healthy carrier. We got a saliva sample from you after all—Nurse Bianchi used a cotton swab—and the mouse we injected with it died of rabies."

Thurwill fixed Hoganth with his penetrating brown eyes. "Negri bodies were found in its brain; no question about it. I'm afraid we're going to have to ask you to remain in isolation until we figure out how to decontaminate you."

Hoganth glared at him, rising weakly to a half-sitting posture and

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supporting himself on his elbows. "The hell you say. I don't plan to stay in this pabulum dispensary a minute longer than I have to—and that means until I'm strong enough to walk out of here. And when I do, I'll have a few things to tell Don Ardling. I'm sure he'll be very interested."

Thurwill cleared his throat. "Albert, possibly you didn't understand me. You are a healthy carrier of rabies. If we can go by the analogy of healthy bat carriers, you might ride an elevator and infect a dozen unsuspecting people with the most horrible disease on earth just by breathing on them. You've just pulled through it yourself; surely you know what it is. The 501K saved you, but we don't know yet that it will work for everybody."

Hoganth narrowed his glittering gray eyes at Thurwill. "*Doctor* Thurwill, I am thoroughly familiar with the medical laws of our state, including the claptrap paragraph that put me in here. I am aware that healthy carriers of certain specified diseases are subject to specific restraints. Will you please cite me the paragraph under which you propose to restrain *me*?"

"Paragraph? In the law? But be reasonable! Of course there's no paragraph: until now there's never been a healthy human carrier of rabies. Oh, we could ask for a law now. But, man, you've taken the Oath of Hippocrates. You've sworn not to enter under any roof except to bring healing. How can you square that with infecting hordes of innocent people with rabies?"

"I've kept in perfect condition all my life." Tiring, Hoganth fell back into bed but without shifting his eyes from Thurwill's face. "I couldn't possibly have a dirty disease like rabies, and I know my rights. I haven't killed all those squirrels yet. I've got a job to do. When can I get my clothes?"

"Hm-m-m, we'll talk about that later. You still can't sit up in bed. But I suppose you're right. Legally we can't hold you against your will just because you happen to be a carrier of the deadliest known disease —and nobody that you infect will have the slightest warning."

But Hoganth's temperature continued to rise, and Thurwill anxiously ordered a series of laboratory tests. "Pneumococcal pneumonia, type 3," reported the lab.

Thurwill uselessly pondered medical books and journals until late in the night, finding nothing that he had not already known. Pneumonia as a secondary and often fatal infection in serious illnesses was an old story. Only a few decades ago, pneumonia had been a frightening complication in any disease that left a patient weakened, and a dangerous malady in its own right. World War II fliers had died of pneumonia simply because they had bailed out of their planes at high altitudes.

But now? When antibiotics were

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available? When such devices as oxygen tents were readily at hand? Thurwill shuddered at the thought of an oxygen tent dense with the infectious virus of rabies, and after he had flicked off his light his sleep was uneasy. He had indeed sworn to the venerable Oath of Hippocrates —but whom could he ask to minister to the patient under that deadly oxygen tent?

It is difficult for a doctor making hospital rounds to make small talk with a balky patient, but Thurwill tried valiantly before burying himself in a completely unnecessary examination of Hoganth's chart. Finally he steeled himself and asked the crucial question. "I don't suppose you've reconsidered your decision not to stay with us until we find out how to keep you from being a rabies carrier?"

"If you want to make jokes, *Doctor,* I suggest that you are in the wrong profession. As you probably are anyhow. A defect which my first conversation with Don Ardling will no doubt remedy."

He could be right, thought Thurwill. *But if I could have brought this man to cooperate with me, he could have supplied us with hyperimmune serum. No more allergic reactions. God, we'd have had a human antigen for producing antibodies.*

Suddenly he remembered the name of the eight-year-old girl. Peggy Ames. Beautiful in spite of the angry bite wound under her left ear, beautiful in the inimitable manner of little girls. She had had a violently allergic reaction to horse serum. Continuing the Pasteur treatment, he switched to another serum. He knew how dangerous a head bite could be and prayed that the new medication might yet work. But his prayers were not answered.

Thurwill glanced once more, searchingly, at Hoganth's iron face. Then, with infinite regret, made an almost imperceptible sign at his nurse, knowing that she was pushing aside the penicillin-filled syringe that could have checked the pneumonia to hand him another one loaded with innocuous saline solution. Grasping it, he plunged it into Hoganth's flank. He was sure that nurse Bianchi was trying to catch his eye, but he refused to look at her.

Maybe he'll change his mind, Thurwill begged Providence. *Maybe he'll come through without medication—the odds are fifty-fifty. I've taken the Oath of Hippocrates; I can't do any more than I have done.* He withdrew the forceless needle and swabbed his patient's skin with a wad of cotton.

Am I really in the right profession? he tormented himself as he filled in meaningless numbers on Hoganth's chart. *Is anybody?* He squared his shoulders and moved on to examine the next patient. ■

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P. Schuyler Miller

GLIMPSES OF THE PAST

One of the happiest ideas in recent publishing history has been Sam Moskowitz's combining of his studies of science fiction and its writers with companion anthologies that demonstrate their work. "Seekers of Tomorrow" is thus paired with "Modern Masterpieces of Science Fiction" and handsomely illustrates the "great age" of science fiction just past. The older "Explorers of the Infinite" now has a companion volume in "Masterpieces of Science Fiction" (World Publishing Co.; 1966; 552 pp.; $6.50), which gives us examples of stories by the early writers from Cyrano de Bergerac and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley to Hugo Gernsback, H. P. Lovecraft and Stanley G. Weinbaum.

School libraries may have sense enough to keep the biographical and literary commentaries and the anthologies together. Ordinary libraries probably won't, since it violates all principles of cataloging.

The title may very well be the author's rather than the publisher's, since Sam Moskowitz is noted for his enthusiasm as well as for his personal knowledge of just about everything ever written in the science-fiction field. Critics may boggle at applying the term "masterpiece" to one of the "Frank Reade, Jr." dime novels and one of Hugo Gernsback's unique Christmas cards. But the stories assembled here do—as they are meant to—illustrate very well the kind of stories these authors wrote, and the kind of science fiction that was typical of their respective eras.

Cyrano's "Voyage to the Moon" is condensed from an early translation and the adventure of the boy inventor of the Nineteenth Century dime novels, Frank Reade, Jr., has also had to be cut to get it in. Olaf Stapledon is represented by a bit from his great "Last and First Men" —the part taking Man to Venus. On the other hand, Edgar Allan Poe's "Hans Phaall—A Tale" is supplemented here by two essays in

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which Poe shows his sound knowledge of physics and astronomy in discussions of his story—in which a young Dutchman goes to the Moon in a balloon—and its relationship to Locke's famous "Moon Hoax," which appeared almost simultaneously. H. G. Wells' "Country of the Blind" is represented by a revision published in a limited edition, in 1939, with a special introduction. And Karel Capek, author of "R.U.R." and originator of the word "robot" in its present sense, is represented by an almost unknown collaboration with his brother Josef, "System," a lampoon of labor relations theories.

To complete the roster, Mrs. Shelley is represented by "The Mortal Immortal," a short story whose treatment of the elixir of life—scientifically respectable in her time—has its counterpart in many more recent stories about the consequences of longevity. Fitz-James O'Brien's "The Wondersmith" I would call fantasy, though it anticipates many aspects of the automaton theme. From Jules Verne we have another rarity, his last story, "Eternal Adam," translated for the first time. In a story much more like Wells or Doyle, Verne shows us people from the far future discovering that a human civilization—ours—had existed millennia before.

Edward Everett Hale's "The Brick Moon" is another prime example of solid science fiction of the late Nineteenth Century, well buttressed with convincing calculations. That the mechanism used to sling the world's first manned satellite into space would no more work than Verne's "Columbiad" is beside the point.

Luis P. Senarens produced an amazing number of yarns about his teen-age inventor, Frank Reade, Jr. The condensation reprinted here is "Lost in a Comet's Tail; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Strange Adventure with His New Air-Ship," from 1903. The airship is a direct steal from Verne's "Clipper of the Clouds," Robur's multi-propeller helicopter, and most of Frank Reade's inventions were shortly thereafter reappropriated by the creators of "Tom Swift." Sam Moskowitz comments frequently on this "borrowing" of plots, themes, details and even characters, but he hasn't pointed out clearly enough that this was—and is—a perfectly respectable practice through which the authors tried to lend verisimilitude to their stories. The authors who enlarged on Lovecraft's synthetic mythology and cosmology did the same thing for the same reason with his enthusiastic consent, and as you know Edward E. Smith's world of the Lensmen is providing a setting for new stories by William B. Ellern, appearing here in Analog. What is suggested is, of course, that these many stories by many writers are all true accounts of a real world, in which the same events have occurred and the same people lived.

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The register of evolving science fiction continues in our century with the Wells story, M. P. Shiel's "The Place of Pain"—a strange morsel that would fit the style of O'Brien's era better than its own—and from A. Conan Doyle the neglected farce, "The Los Amigos Fiasco," with its murderer made immortal by an overcharged electric chair. Edgar Rice Burroughs is represented by the little-known "The Resurrection of Jimber-Jaw"—a revived Paleolithic man—though I think I'd have preferred one of the "jungle tales" of Tarzan—the short episodes in the Venus and Barsoom series and "The Moon Maid" being too long.

A. Merritt with "The People of the Pit," Lovecraft with "The Colour Out of Space," and Weinbaum with "The Lotus Eaters" bring us down to the roots of the present science-fiction movement. Hugo Gernsback, its creator, is represented by one of the delightful storylets he puts in his Christmas booklets—far more modern in tone than the stories he wrote in the 1920s. And Philip Wylie, with "Jungle Journey," shows that he can do good conventional SF-adventure with a slick-paper touch.

Finally, it should be pointed out that Sam has done an excellent introduction that is, in effect, a capsule condensation of the companion book. It helps make up for the fact that the libraries will inevitably separate the stories from the chronicle they illustrate so well.

World Publishing should by all means commission—and Sam Moskowitz write—a third volume in this series, dealing with the science-fiction greats of today.

THE JUDGMENT OF EVE

By Edgar Pangborn • Simon and Schuster, New York • 1966 • 223 pp. • $3.95

I think readers are going to remember this strange, and strangely rich, little book, but it isn't going to win any prizes.

Edgar Pangborn has written his version of Frank Stockton's classic teaser, "The Lady and the Tiger"—even to the tiger—entangled it with some themes from Grimm, and transposed it to the future some time between our lives and the era of "Davy." The cities of America have been destroyed in the "One-Day War" between us and Russia; plagues have completed the destruction of our society, and remnants of humanity are making a new life as best they can in New England.

Eve Newman, in her late twenties, is one of these. She lives with her blind mother and an idiot Caliban of a mutated hired man on the remains of the home farm in the Massachusetts hills. To her come three oddly assorted men from the outer world. Claudius Gardiner, sixtyish, is a former concert violinist with a mangled hand, who has been roaming the countryside

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searching for fragments of humanity whom he hopes to bring together some day to found a new society of reasoning men. Kenneth Bellamy is a near-sighted, bookish young man whom Claudius has found in the inbred, crabbed hamlet called Shelter Town, more puritan and rigid than the Seventeenth Century. Ethan Nye is a tall, vigorous redhead, able to live anywhere in the wilderness and shape it to his will.

Eve will marry one of the three. She sends them away, to return when the leaves change color and tell her what love is. The book is the story of their three quests. Where each man goes and what he does is controlled basically by the kind of person he is—yet each learns, each changes, and through their eyes we see the new wilderness of the future, made real as only Edgar Pangborn can do in quite this way. He loves this countryside, passed by, as some say, by our times. He understands it. He knows the kind of people who can live harmoniously as part of it, and those who, like the tormented folk of Shelter Town, have always fought it.

He has never written a bad book, though he has written books many science-fiction enthusiasts don't like. This may be one of them.

MASTERS OF THE MAZE
By Avram Davidson • Pyramid Books, New York • No. R1208 • 156 pp. • 50¢

In some scholarly circles it is a flat insult to call a man an antiquarian. I hope Avram Davidson doesn't subscribe to that philosophy, for that is what he is. In my scale of values, an antiquarian is a man who both understands and relishes the past, who feels a personal continuity with it, who knows why George Washington's thundermug is different from Great-Great-Great-Grandpa's. (Avram did a wonderful story once about wooden Indians: Remember?)

Avram also relishes the future, the present, all other times and places, all other races and species, and can impart some of that relish to his readers. He is not afraid of the Dickensian formula of keeping several plots and subplots and dozens of characters moiling around, though I suppose he can—if he wants to—also do the modern story with one man with a monomania observed for one hour in one place, for no reason.

This one has everything in it. The only apt adjective—which I hate as applied to art—is "rich." It has monsters. It has freemasonry. It has innumerable worlds. It has fully portrayed characters—including a couple of monsters—who pop up and vanish. It has a rather feckless hero who gets involved and blunders into all the feck he needs.

The Maze of the title is an amazing concept that manages to tie all the variations of all the time-travel stories, past, future *and* sidewise,

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into one Gordian knot. It has been entangled in space and time since they were initiated, whether that was in the Big Bang or the Forever cosmos. It leads wanderers into and around places and times past, present, future and parallel, on this planet and others, in our galaxy and others, everywhere, everywhen, forever and ever. Ways into it have been found in the past; ways through it have been explored; magicians and scientists and ne'er-do-wells have appointed themselves guardians to keep the monstrous Chulpex from burrowing through it to swallow up the worlds of men.

Yet, as Avram shows them to us, the monstrous Chulpex are not monsters, except in body, biology and the threat they raise against mankind. They are understood monsters. They are Snoopy's Red Baron: deadly yet brotherly. They —but go on and read it. You don't get this kind of story any more unless Avram Davidson writes it.

A PLAGUE OF PYTHONS

By Frederik Pohl • Ballantine Books, N.Y. • No. U2174 • 158 pp. • 50¢

You'd never recognize the Frederik Pohl of "Space Merchants" and the other social satires in this one, expanded from the 1962 version in *Galaxy*. There's no fun in what has hit the world he describes.

Before the story opens, the nations of the world have clobbered themselves to ruin with nuclear bombs, disease and every other conceivable means of destruction. And the people of the world are carrying on the "good work" of destroying mankind singly and in droves. Persons, suddenly "possessed," watch themselves rape, slaughter, burn, pillage. Pockets of human society react with equal violence. But who the possessors are, how they function, what they want are total mysteries—until the protagonist, an electronics engineer named Chandler, encounters them halfway through the book.

Then, of course, the theme shifts: join them or fight them—for I guess it can be said that they are human, a self-elected elite reshaping the world to their own purposes.

This is the kind of story Hollywood could make into a good film without departing too far from its mad scientist pattern, if only it would play the story straight. Of course, it never will.

THE EYES OF HEISENBERG

By Frank Herbert • Berkley Books, New York • No. F1283 • 158 pp. • 50¢

You'd never recognize the Frank Herbert of "Dune" or "The Dragon in the Sea" in this one. It reads like something A. E. van Vogt might have plotted after a session with some modern genetic work, and in the days before he let his plots grow so involved that they began to

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strangle in their own ramifications.

In the world of the story a strictly limited number of genetically selected parents are permitted to pass on their genes to another generation. Genetic surgeons "cut" the gamete and alter its enzyme patterns to produce the kind of man or woman the rulers of Earth—the Optimen—have decided they need. Occasionally the surgeons will detect the characteristics that may make an Optiman—a near-immortal superman.

The story opens as one such embryo is to be shaped . . . but some outside force has interfered. What force, for what purpose, and with what success is the story. Involved are the parents, part of an underground opposing the Optimen rule . . . the Cyborgs, android-like blends of men and machines . . . the neuter Sterries . . . and a few of the Optimen, most of whom are content to be spectators as long as their comforts are not disturbed. But the purpose and significance of the genetic interference that set the whole melee in motion is never quite clear—at least, never really important. Intrigue drifts into straight action a bit too soon, and the end is as bloody as *Hamlet*.

THE WATCH BELOW

By James White • Ballantine Books, New York • No. U2285 • 189 pp. • 50¢

This is a *tour de force* by the English author of the happily remembered "Hospital Station" and "Space Surgeon," which is full of fascinating detail but doesn't come off as a book.

The author tells parallel stories of two "generation ships." One is the *Gulf Trader*, a converted tanker, torpedoed out of a World War II convoy with three men and two young women sealed into a well-provisioned hold. When the ship goes aground, deep off the European coast, they have worked out a mechanism of survival and they make their society endure through generation after generation for a century and more.

Meanwhile, out in space, the flagship of a nonhuman armada is plunging across the light-years toward Earth. Behind them, their sun has gone nova; their planets have been scorched or vaporized. They are a water-people, and they know only one world with seas where they can make a new home, rebuild a civilization. Colonists, crew, food animals are in deep-frozen sleep; officers are to sleep in relays, so that the fleet will always be directed. Only it appears that relay sleep will destroy the minds of those who are repeatedly thawed and refrozen—so one of the co-captains determines that the officers cannot sleep, that they must stay awake and breed and train their generations of descendants for the eventual job of landing on Earth.

Obstacles interfere with both plans, human and unhuman. In the

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end, men and monsters meet head-on, and there is a perhaps too pat, too evident solution to all the problems of both crews. Nevertheless, James White is one of the vigorous new British writers whom John Carnell encouraged to write for *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* when he edited them, and who are going right on writing for his successors, growing better and better.

STUPIDTHEOREMS

By Dwight W. Batteau • Windward House, 51 Lexington Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts • $2.00

At various times, Analog has published some of Dr. Batteau's "Stupidtheorems": this is a collection of them. Since they are, in effect, mathematical theorems, information theory basics, and meaning theory concepts translated into English, they are exceedingly succinct statements of very broad—and thoroughly disturbing!—truths.

It was Dr. Batteau who translated the Three Laws of Thermodynamics into English as:

1. You can't win. (Law of Conservation of Energy.)

2. You can't even break even. (Law of Entropy.)

3. Moreover, there's no way to get out of the game.
(Unattainability of absolute zero.)

"Stupidtheorems" consists of a collection of similarly incisive comments about the universe of reality—such as "The probability of predicting correctly in total ignorance is zero," balanced by "The only thing you can learn is something you don't know. Only from a state of ignorance can information be gained."

Because they are, in essence, epigrams, a dozen words may take an hour for full appreciation. Result: You're paying about 10¢ a word for this book—and it'll take a minimum of one week of thinking on your part to fully appreciate what it says! J.W.C.

CORRECTION

In the January "Reference Library" I said that there had been three or four books in the English series of new-story anthologies, "New Writings in SF," edited by John Carnell. He promptly set me straight by sending me the British paperbacks of "New Writings" Seven and Eight, and Judith Merril's commentary in her "Best SF" pointed out that the series is now quarterly.

If you live in any city where you can buy British paperbacks—New York and Washington, certainly—you may be able to get the whole series. I dunno what the U.S. price would be: in England they are three shillings six pence, or around fifty cents. It may be, since Bantam has started to bring out the early numbers, that the British editions can't be sold here at all. Anyway, there are twice as many as I thought, and Number 9 may be out in England by the time you read this.

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brass tack

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Just a note about your March issue to let you know how much I'm enjoying Harrison's "The Time-Machined Saga." It's real nice to see good honest everyday names in a story rather than those odd ones like Smith, Jones, et cetera.

Only thing is it seems like Poul Anderson should be the author.

ORIM TORKELSON
Barncroft, South Dakota
Viewpoints differ maybe?

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Your analysis of the Viet Nam situation included a few points which are worth pursuing, though not necessarily in connection with Viet Nam, *per se*.

Throughout the editorial you seem to be mixing up two kinds of indictments against men like Hitler, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, or, somewhat more remotely, Genghis Khan. On the one hand you condemn these people for embracing a "philosophy of imposing by force of arms a One World system," and on the other you find them dangerous because they are "absolutely intransigent" and "cannot consider any compromise." At times you separate these two traits, while at times you seem to consider them as one-and-the-same-evil. But clearly, you have not shown that to be convinced that one's political convictions are correct is identical to having the motivation to force others to conform and embrace these views and to live by them.

Personally, I am convinced, on rational—not religious—grounds that the political system of voluntarism—or capitalism, or laissez-faire, or a system wherein the government is confined in its operations to protecting individual rights—is correct for men to live by if they want to live in society. Note that I claim that I *know* that it is correct, correct to the exclusion of any other form of government—including Communism, with which you seem to find little to quarrel.

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But note also, please, that the very system which I embrace is in conflict with the idea of forcing others to adhere to it. The most fundamental tenet of the moral principles underlying voluntarism, as the name implies, is that no man must force another to follow his aims—excepting in self-defense. But this is just what the "philosophies" of Hitler, *et al*, demand of their followers —that is, to force everyone into their own ranks.

It is interesting to note that you assert, without proof or clarification, that ". . . perfection in all respects is impossible in this Universe . . ." What does this mean? If it does mean anything at all, just how do you know that it is impossible? Is not your belief (!) that perfection is impossible an equally uncompromising one? Is it not incumbent upon you to prove, as the barbarians you list not only could not, but would not, prove that your flagrant generalization is a correct one? And *if* it is a correct one, are you willing to compromise on it?

When reason, the sound application of one's faculties, leads a man to know certain things, including what makes for a proper society of men, there is every reason to be uncompromising about his views—though none at all to force others to live by them. I think that the distinction between intransigency and the use of force—coercion—is clear. I am surprised that you, sir, would be willing or careless enough to ignore it in your otherwise fine editorial.

TIBOR R. MACHAN
850 Camino Pescadero, #8
Goleta, California 93017

Ah, me! the same old problem! Define "self-defense." Trouble is, somehow people find that "my beliefs" become "part of me" and, therefore, are included in "self-defense!"

Dear Mr. Campbell:

The April issue of Analog had a story entitled "Ambassador to Verdammt." This story postulates a being so alien as to be incomprehensible to humans. It also postulates that these were intelligent beings; that they changed their environment. This yields the conclusion that they were aware of their environment and of themselves.

Therefore, these beings are not incomprehensible to humans, as follows:

I think, therefore I am
I think, therefore I remember
I remember, therefore I was.
I was and now am, therefore there is past and present.
In the past there was future.
If there was future, there is future.
If there is past, present and future, existence is in sequence of past, present and future.
That which perceives its existence perceives past, present and future.

This was implied in the development of the story.

There is inherently a common

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ground of awareness between all sentient beings. Sensory methods may differ.

GALE ASCH

Route 2, Box 186-1
McKinney, Texas

Well—but do they perceive the same things, the same way? Do you —can you—understand what a porpoise perceives by sonar?

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I have been a reader of your magazine for many years and have long thought it one of the best in its field. However, this is not the reason I am writing this letter, but rather to compliment you personally on your editorial entitled "Secret Science" in the January, 1967, issue of *Analog*. As a pharmacist, I was particularly interested in your refutation of the idea that "generic equivalents" are identical in efficacy as well as contents. As you may know, this subject has been the cause of a running, four-sided debate in the medical field with most pharmacists and doctors opposed to the use of "generic equivalents" in compounding prescriptions and most government welfare programs and some hospital administrations in favor of their use. I count myself among the former group, our main contention being that "generic equivalents" are not identical and thus that their use in compounding prescriptions calling for brand-name products would not be in the best interests of public health and welfare. The latter group, however, persists in looking only at the costs involved.

Your presentation of the reasons why ethical pharmaceutical firms must charge higher prices than generic pharmaceutical houses is, I'm sure, familiar in some variation to most pharmacists as the same reasons they must repeat dozens of times a day to explain to patients why their prescriptions cost so much. I'm sure if more of our patients would read your article, it would save a lot of explaining on our part.

RICHARD M. ERICKSON, R.PH.
5116 Pershing Blvd.
Apartment 106
Kenosha, Wisconsin 53140

And as my own doctor points out, Jack Daniels, Cullamore Dew and Kentucky moonshine are generic equivalents—distilled alcoholic beverages. Maybe barkeeps should be allowed to substitute "generic equivalents"?

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Blast you, John Campbell! For months I've been looking forward, month by month, to your delightful editorials and now you've done me dirt!

I don't refer to it as my "sense of security," rather I relegate it to the realm of "what is and what is *not* suitable," so there.

When I was a very little girl my sainted, departed mother discovered that I "heard" people "say"

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things that no one else heard. Upon questioning she found that people "talked" two ways, out loud and not out loud. In my five-year-old innocence I didn't know that everyone didn't "hear" the not-out-loud talking. But she told me, thank God, or I'd have wound up in the Funny Farm! And the passage of time has taught me that to live successfully and comfortably in the world-as-it-is, one with the doubtful gift (more like curse!) that I unfortunately have been hag-ridden by for nearly fifty years, had better, rather *best*, suppress, disregard, deny, forget its existence!

I believe that it can be trained and developed to a remarkable degree. In another time and place, in the proper surroundings this might be great, but remember, scarcely more than a century ago, "witches" were burned at the stake and a half century ago, when I was born, they put small children on Funny Farms. I'm neither Crusader nor Martyr material. I find that about eighty percent of the time I'm as normal as anyone and it doesn't alter the even flow of existence if one "hears" a stranger "say" something odd and ignores it. And if one wants one's young son it's most helpful to "look" for him without leaving the endless dishes and ironing and he comes when I "call" him, too. It's fun to carry on a "conversation" with him and with my sister without a spoken word on either side, but I'm not sure all three of us wouldn't wind up on the Funny Farm if we published it.

From where I sit it serves no practical "suitable" purpose in my life as I wish to live it. Besides the possibilities are frightening and I *do not wish to be frightened.*

I do wish you'd temper your editorials and stop shaking people up. As you can see, I'm only gleeful at your writings when I agree and when it's someone else being shaken. So I'm human! That's my right, isn't it?

I'm very willing to let all the Dr. Rhines and Professor Tenhaeffs and Girard Croisets there may be experiment and play games until H—freezes and thaws and I hope they come up with something to keep kids less fortunate than me and mine off the Funny Farm, but I'll take vanilla, thank you! And, God willing, I'll be gone before they blow my "sense of what is and what is *not* suitable" to bits around my suitably deaf ears!

Name withheld by request

In a culture that denies telepathy, only the stupid persist in admitting they know by direct experience that it exists!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

While reading the first installment of "The Time-Machined Saga," I noticed some consistent errors in the Old Norse quotations. On page 38 for example, "Hvar erut per rakka?" should read "Hvar eru* ⱶer rakka?" Both of these symbols represent "th"—the correct

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transliteration—and were borrowed, along with the Roman alphabet proper, from the Anglo-Saxons—the missionaries got to England first.

The first symbol, "crossed d" is evidently a simple modification of "d". The second one, called "thorn," was taken over from the old runic alphabet that was used by many Germanic peoples, primarily for writing inscriptions. Although Icelandic is the only language in which thorn and crossed d are still regularly used in writing, thorn survived long enough in England to be transported to the American colonies. By this time, it was being written with the top of the loop left open, so that it resembled a "y." Thus the archaic orthography in signs such as "ye olde antique shoppe," where "ye" stands for an earlier "ꝥe."

STAN COWLEY

University of Alberta,
Edmonton, Alberta.

*ꝥ *correct symbols not available! Those symbols don't seem to be available in standard American print shops! But I'm glad to know where "Ye" Olde Antique Shoppe came from. That "Ye" stuff has been a thorn to me for years.*

Dear John:

In Analog for March, 1967 (p. 159) P. Schuyler Miller says that, in criticizing Velikovsky, "L. Sprague de Camp and Willy Ley seem to have been trapped into using, in articles of their own, the 'evidence' of specialists who misquoted Velikovsky, picked statements out of context in order to refute them with irrelevant information, and otherwise behaved like the California censors who wanted the Tarzan books banned—they had never read any of them . . ."

Willy can take care of himself. I have reread what I wrote about Velikovsky and cannot see what, in my writings, Miller refers to. These writings comprise a review of "Worlds in Collision," published in Astounding Science Fiction for September, 1950, pp. 138-41, and a paraphrase of this review in my book "Lost Continents" (1954, pp. 89ff). If Miller implies that I did not read "Worlds in Collision," but merely drew upon previous reviews by Payne-Gaposchkin and others, he is mistaken. I not only read the book but still have my copy.

I summarized Velikovsky's theories: that a comet, expelled from the planet Jupiter, twice grazed the earth in -XVI, reversing the direction of the earth's spin, changing the position of the earth's axis and the shape of its orbit, and lengthening the year by five days. Velikovsky, p. 203:

"A comet became a planet. Venus was born as a comet in the second millennium before the present era. In the middle of that millennium it twice made contact with the earth and changed its cometary orbit . . ." *et passim.*

I also cited the unscrupulous

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methods by which Velikovsky distorted ancient legends to make them fit his scheme. Velikovsky, p. 147:

"One point in Plato's story about . . . Atlantis requires correction . . . Critias the younger remembered having been told that the catastrophe which befell Atlantis happened nine thousand years before . . . Whatever the source of the error, the most probable date of the sinking of Atlantis would be in the middle of the second millennium, nine hundred years before Solon . . ."

I pointed out that Velikovsky's theories were ridiculous from the point of view of celestial mechanics. Citing Robert S. Richardson, I said that, judging from the lack of perturbation of the orbits of planets and planetoids near which they passed, no comet was known to have a mass greater than one-millionth that of the earth. Therefore, a comet could not have the effects alleged by Velikovsky. (J. C. Duncan more conservatively puts the upper limit at one 100,000th of the earth's mass; "Astronomy," p. 303.) Nor could Venus, with .82 times the earth's mass, ever have been a comet in the ordinary sense of the word. I stated that, with planetary masses, the forces involved in any collision would be such that the tensile strength of their component materials would be negligible. In other words, they would behave like spheres of liquid and simply splash. I could, of course, have gone into more detail had space permitted and had anyone been willing to pay for my time and effort.

I do not see where I misquoted Velikovsky, used irrelevant information, or behaved like a California censor. It seems to me that Miller comes close to asserting that Velikovsky has the right to publish all the absurdities he likes, but that his critics do not have an equal right to call them absurd.

When Dr. de Grazia published the special Velikovsky number of "The American Behavioran Scientist," I was asked for comment thereon. I suggested that, instead of trying to psychoanalyze Velikovsky's critics in absentia, to determine what obscure, Freudian complexes impelled them to denounce Velikovsky, the authors of these articles might do better to learn a little physics and astronomy. Thus they would learn that the critics were calling Velikovsky's theories nonsense because they were nonsense, and no psychiatric interpretation of the critics' motives was called for. The advice still holds good.

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

Moreover, Venus has an almost perfectly circular orbit—anything but a cometary one!

To reverse the direction of earth's rotation would require the imposition of forces so great as to totally shatter the surface of the planet—not merely flood it!

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Incommunicado

continued from page 7

it's a statistical probability of very high order.

But he can't know which ones are the Bulls and Maurys. He can't deal with them as a personal interrelationship—the communication on a direct interaction basis is impossible by sheer, overwhelming complexity.

The Army operates on an hierarchal system, and thereby makes possible effective action. The general who doesn't know the PFCs does know the colonels, who know the majors, who know their captains, who are in personal contact with the lieutenants who can select the sergeants who know the right men for the job.

The sergeants pretty quickly learn whether the lieutenant knows his business or not—and have, long since, worked out ways and means to get the word to the captains—who know their job includes seeing to it that they do get the word from the sergeants) and the majors aren't long for that rank if they don't make sure the captains *are* checking up on their lieutenants.

There's very little direct contact between a PFC—or a captain, for that matter—and General Storm. But there are feedback channels.

The basic necessity, however, is the feeling of faith and trust—the feeling that each higher rank (1) knows its business and does it and (2) that each higher rank does its damndest for the men in the next lower rank. The Army calls this "morale."

In war, every man realizes that things are *not* going to be comfy-cozy—that there will be imperfections of supply, maneuver, and that the enemy is specifically and deliberately doing his damndest to louse things up. So imperfections are accepted.

In peace, however, there's a completely irrational belief that Everything Oughta Be Perfect and that Somebody Oughta Fix Things if they aren't.

Now curiously, Bill Blow is eager to fix things the way he knows they oughta be when it comes to making somebody else do what he wants done—but is astonishingly reluctant to be told what needs to be done when he's the one that should do it.

A typical example is the vehemence of ghetto-dwellers on the subject Somebody Oughta Clean Up This Place, but the total disinclination to appoint themselves as the appropriate Somebody. The major difference between the suburban community and the ghetto is that the suburbanite appoints himself as the Somebody to clean up and maintain his house and yard; the ghettoite "appoints" his landlord and the City to do that—and demands that the City pay him Welfare because he has no job.

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The individual in a great-numbers cultural system of any kind *can not have full intercommunication.* It's inherently impossible because of that exponential expansion of interrelationships.

The Army technique of hierarchal arrangement makes *effective* communication possible.

In the universities, the bigger they are, the worse the communication system. The University of California, being the biggest of the big, including all its scattered campuses, has the worst problem. It's completely impossible for the individual student to have any real communication with the organization—no sense of individual interrelationship. It's simply impossible. There *is no way now known.*

Conceivably something like full telepathy might make it possible. But imagine that each student were given a special little walkie-talkie by which he could, at any time, have direct contact with the top faculty of the University; that his call would reach the man he wanted immediately, would be listened to, and a considered reply given him.

Impossible, isn't it? If some 1,000 students are using those walkie-talkies simultaneously, it's obvious none will get his message through. And with the number of students enrolled—that situation would be the norm.

It's characteristic of the college-age human being that he has strong convictions, highly developed logical thinking, a strong sense of his own growing importance—and a marked lack of adequate sense of realistic judgment.

It's necessarily so; evolution inescapably produced that effect. The strong sense of self and competence was essential to get the young-adult started on trying *his* way of life—on testing himself against the real world.

Characteristically, it had a high death rate down the ages—which benefited the race, if not the individuals involved. It rapidly eliminated the foolhardy, but not the bold; it eliminated the arrogant, but not the self-respecting. The intransigents got themselves killed off; the determined stayed around long enough to mature.

There's been a lot of talk recently about allowing eighteen-year-olds to vote. I suggest we consult the automobile accident insurance companies on the matter of whether or not this age-group shows, *in real-world action,* an appropriate level of judgment.

Their record is not good. The eighteen to twenty-five year old males have excellent physical health, their reflexes are faster than those of any other age-group, their senses are keen, their physical endurance at its peak.

At my age, my reflexes are markedly slower, my health imperfect, and my endurance markedly lower. My senses aren't what they were forty years ago.

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Yet somehow my age-group manages, with all those handicaps, to show an accident rate so much lower that we have much lower insurance premiums.

If any group is to get the vote early, it should be the girls; their accident rate is markedly lower than that of young males—despite the fact that they're weaker physically, and are, traditionally, "women drivers."

However, they're not so given to being foolhardy, arrogant and intransigent. A girl feels she can acknowledge she's afraid of a risk—and be rationally cautious. The boy tends not to.

The thing is—the young males have always been the tribe's warriors. And if they weren't bold, self-respecting and determined—some other tribe eliminated them.

The characteristics that make for the necessary warrior abilities are, unless restrained and channeled wisely by judgment, distinctly self-liquidating.

In the tribal system, that necessary judgment was supplied, in considerable measure, by older, more experienced men, men the younger men respected and trusted, even when they couldn't see the point of the older man's ideas.

But that respect and trust stemmed from strong, personal interrelationship—a man-to-man interaction that permitted the younger man to learn to respect and trust the older's wisdom and experience and judgment, even though he could not understand it.

There are more things that are true and not explainable than there are things that can be communicated. It's completely impossible to explain to a child what it feels like to get a 120-volt 60-cycle electric shock; it simply can't be done—until he's experienced it.

Anyone can explain what "love" means—if by that term you mean simply physical sex. But no one can explain to you what true emotional love is, until you've experienced it—and then it is, of course, unnecessary to explain it. If you've never had a child of your own—it's utterly futile to attempt to explain what the emotional attachment is like. If you have, it's unnecessary to discuss it.

There are things which the younger must accept on trust; there always have been, and always will be. There is no other way.

If you want to see a perfect case of one hundred percent futile-frustrating effort to communicate where precisely such communication is impossible—watch an eighteen-year-old, deeply smitten of a pretty young miss, trying to explain things to his twelve-year-old brother, who *knows* that *gurrrrls* are utterly worthless. The twelve-year-old hasn't got what it takes to comprehend the experience the eighteen-year-old is enduring/enjoying; because he hasn't, he can't be told, and can't

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comprehend that there is anything worth bothering to comprehend. He knows he's no longer a child, and certainly can recognize utterly brainless slush when he sees it.

And the older brother, who knows that the mush in the situation is where the fool kid ought to have brains, is of a mood to slaughter the brat. Patience is not a normal characteristic of the eighteen-year-old.

That he himself could be producing an entirely similar urge to slaughter in his parents is, of course, entirely beyond his comprehension. He *knows* he's being wise and judicious—usually reinforced with the term "modern."

For these reasons we are forced to conclude that even telepathy wouldn't help the top faculty of a great university to put over the important realities which cannot be communicated. Oh, if we assume telepathy has an overpowering brainwash effect, and can force the receiving mind into any desired mold—then, maybe, yes.

Now the term "human dignity" is thrown around as a sort of Ultimate Authority and flag-waving appeal to rally to the Cause. Everybody wants it. Hm-m-m . . . everybody wants "happiness," too.

The fact that you want something doesn't mean automatically that it's good for you, that you have a right to it, or that it's even possible. Despite what the Declaration of Independence says, nobody is apt to take up arms to defend a sadist's "right" to pursue his idea of happiness.

What *is* "human dignity"?

Largely it's an individual's feeling that his feelings, his ideas, his needs and wants should be respected, his opinions listened to and considered. That the society around him should be aware that he's present, and consider his importance.

The breakdown of communication in an immensely complex society makes that impossible. Ask most people what's the loneliest situation they can imagine, and the commonest answer you'll get is "Being alone in a crowd." I.e., being present and totally ignored. In terms of Dr. Batteau's "Stupidtheorems," that is

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"If no one is aware of you, you don't exist."

Watch a three-year-old surrounded by adults who are busily and happily discussing the party they attended, and who said what to whom. The adults talk over his head, and gently brush him off when he clings to them and tries to communicate to them. Presently he stands off, contemplates them for a while, then marches over, hauls back his foot, and kicks Mama or Aunt Mary a good one on the shin. Immediately he comes back into existence—he is noticed. Sure—he gets spanked, and is sent to his room angrily. But at least he knows he has human dignity—he was noticed.

Most of the riots—campus or Watts type—protest marches, sit-ins, et cetera, have fundamental similarities to that young three-year-old's kick-in-the-shins maneuver. He isn't interested in injuring Aunt Mary's shin—it's just that that's the handiest place to kick her. The problem is getting communication through, and regaining a sense of being noticed and being important in some degree.

The concept's a little abstract for a three-year-old, but he could get a similar effect if he got hold of some matches and set fire to the curtains, too. Arson attracts attention.

Communication is essential to something more than mere self-respect—it's the foundation of a *sense of existence*. Most stories dealing with the man-suddenly-converted-to-ghost deal with his sense of being totally lost because no one pays any attention to him—not even walls notice him.

In a highly complex society, communication on a direct-line, individual-to-individual basis is absolutely impossible.

In a hyper-democratic society which contends all men are equal, and have equal right to have their opinions accepted and acted on, individuals are encouraged to demand direct-wire contact with everyone else. And to reject any sort of hierarchic chain-of-command approach.

Specifically, they are encouraged to reject the idea that someone else might be wiser, have wider understanding, and be rational, wise, and completely fair in rejecting their wants. That a superior *does* exist, and that the superior's understanding is *broader than they are capable of comprehending*, so that they must accept his refusal on trust.

That attitude can cause a certain amount of trouble in a small community of a couple hundred pioneering citizens, when one paranoic muddlehead thinks he is as wise as the elected leader, and doesn't trust anyone.

In an immensely complex culture, in which something like 0.01% of the population has ability sufficient to form some vague understanding of the overall problems, and the other 99.99% are going to have to rely on that 0.01%—popular de-

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mocracy cannot work the way it can in a small village.

Communication breaks down.

An hierarchic system developed in armies because that was the *only* way that worked.

But it depends on "morale"—trust and respect for the members of the hierarchy. And an acceptance that some of the guys *are* better, more skilled, experienced, and/or wiser than *you* are.

You can not operate an unlimited popular democracy of everybody's-equal in a highly complex system involving hundreds of million, or billions, of units.

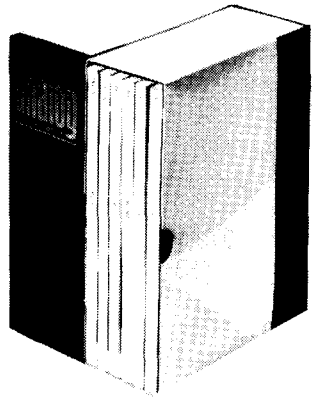
Now this *does not* mean that "only a military dictatorship can rule."

We Americans—those who bothered studying a little American history, anyhow—have excellent evidence that this is *not* true.

The system that has worked, and worked with tremendous success, is a *representative* democracy, not a *popular* democracy. That's how the United States began; it worked.

It requires a social order in which inequality of real ability is recognized, and respected. A cultural system in which individuals were encouraged to feel satisfaction in being top-notch third-class citizens. In which men took pride in being craftsmen, and didn't feel that they had to be Bank President to be worthy.

The rejection of the hierarchic structure led to the breakdown of



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the sense of communication; failing communication led to more desperate demands for higher status, on the grounds that only high status could get communications through. That broke down communications even more . . .

Currently there is almost no feeling in the culture that a real, worthwhile individual could submit to someone else's advice, just because that other person is wiser, more experienced, or more highly trained. That's acting on mere faith and trust. That's yielding to arbitrary, authoritarian, dictatorial commands—it's cowardly, it's wicked and evil to yield, it's weakness to act on the basis that your parents might know something you can't understand. Or that your superiors might—because superiority doesn't exist of course.

Too bad that system is so cowardly, wicked, evil, awful and is now rejected so vociferously.

That cowardly-evil system built America. It also built the English culture from which America stemmed. It involved such now-rejected concepts as God and patriotism and loyalty to another man.

We also got along without immense state-operated welfare in those days; those wicked-evil aristocrats took care of their own, and routinely helped any man who showed signs of helping himself. The ones who suffered were the slobs who wouldn't do anything useful for anyone.

The Industrial Revolution began breaking that down—because it made possible great increases in the number of individuals a small area could support. The communication between man and man began to overwhelm the available techniques.

A new cultural-social system is certainly needed.

We do not need a military dictatorship.

But neither is the popular democracy technique showing any signs of solving the basic problem.

Are you *sure* that an absolute ruling aristocracy is an evil and unworkable thing? Even one that's been carefully, laboriously worked out on an hierarchic basis over many, many generations of trial and error, under all sorts of real-world challenges?

Then dethrone that arbitrary, absolute tyrant between your ears—that gray aristocracy that lives in its stone-walled castle up on top, demanding tribute of oxygen, food, and comfort at the expense of the trillions of worker cells! Away with that luxury-loving ruling aristocracy! Free the trillions of working individuals, and establish perfect equality among all the individual cells!

It's guaranteed to work—just destroy that unequal hierarchy, and perfect equality results.

All the cells are dead very shortly.

The Editor.

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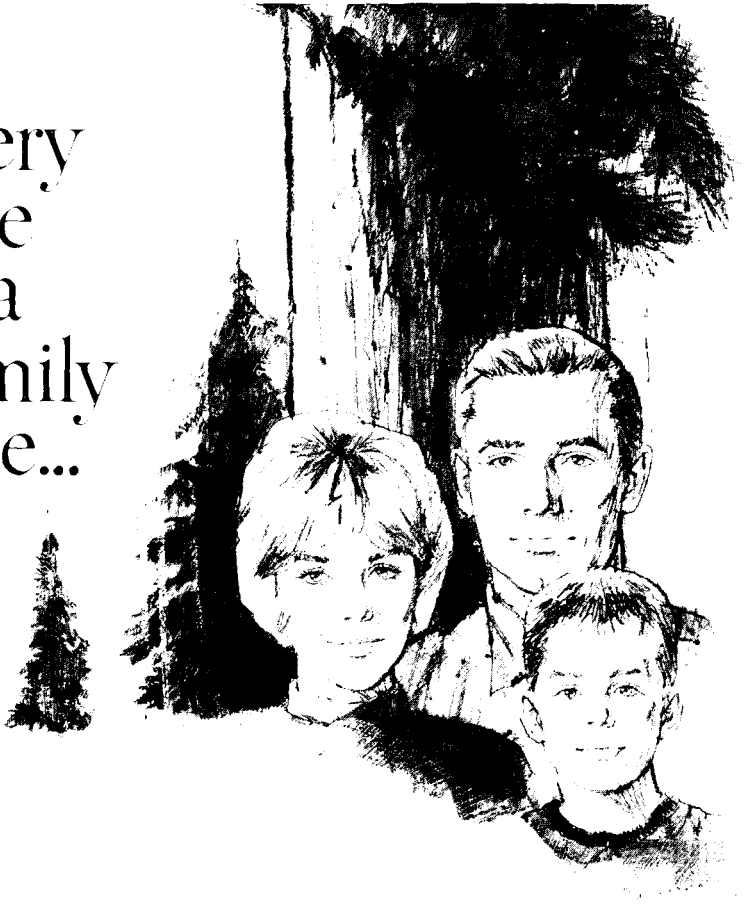

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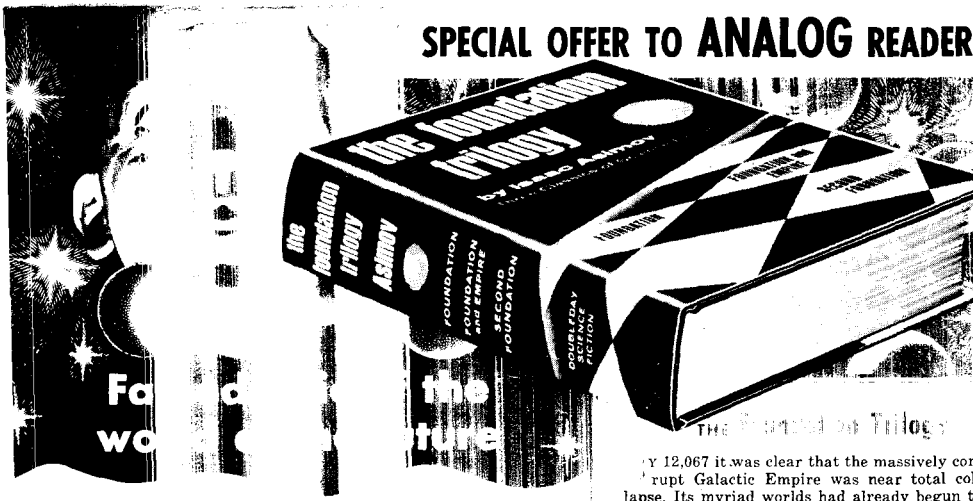

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